

PENGUIN ARADE

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ENGUIN PARADE

**new stories, poems, etc, by
contemporary writers**

2

**EDITED BY
DENYS KILHAM ROBERTS**



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Johnny Pye and the Fool-Killer

BY STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

You don't hear so much about the Fool-Killer these days, but when Johnny Pye was a boy there was a good deal of talk about him. Some said he was one kind of person, and some said another, but most people agreed that he came around fairly regular. Or, it seemed so to Johnny Pye. But then Johnny was an adopted child, which is, maybe, why he took it so hard.

The miller and his wife had offered to raise him, after his own folks died, and that was a good deed on their part. But as soon as he lost his baby teeth and started acting the way most boys act, they started to come down on him like thunder, which wasn't so good. They were good people, according to their lights, but their lights were terrible strict ones, and they believed that the harder you were on a youngster, the better and brighter he got. Well, that may work with some children, but it didn't with Johnny Pye.

He was sharp enough and willing enough—as sharp and willing as most boys in Martinsville. But, somehow or other, he never seemed to be able to do the right things or say the right words—at least when he was home. Treat a boy like a fool and he'll act like a fool, I say—but there's some folks need convincing. The miller and his wife thought the way to smarten Johnny was to treat him like a fool—and finally they got so he pretty much believed it himself.

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And that was hard on him—for he had a boy's imagination, and maybe a little more than most. He could stand the beatings and he did. But what he couldn't stand was the way things went at the mill. I don't suppose the miller intended to do it. But as long as Johnny Pye could remember, whenever he heard of the death of somebody he didn't like, he'd say, "Well, the Fool-Killer's come for So-and-so," and sort of smack his lips. It was, as you might say, a family joke—but the miller was a big man with a big red face, and it made a strong impression on Johnny Pye. Till, finally, he got a picture of the Fool-Killer himself. He was a big man, too, in a checked shirt and corduroy trousers, and he went walking the ways of the world, with a hickory club that had a lump of lead in the end of it, in one hand. I don't know how Johnny Pye got that picture so clear—but, to him, it was just as plain as the face of any human being in Martinsville. And now and then, just to test it, he'd ask a grown-up person, kind of timidly, if that was the way the Fool-Killer looked. And, of course, they'd generally laugh and tell him it was. Then Johnny would wake up at night, in his room over the mill, and listen for the Fool-Killer's step on the road and wonder when he was coming. But he was brave enough not to tell anybody that.

Finally, though, things got a little more than he could bear. He'd done some boy's trick or other—let the stones grind a little fine, maybe, when the miller wanted the meal ground coarse—just carelessness, you know, not badness. But he'd gotten two whippings for it, one from the miller and one from his wife, and at the end of it, the miller had said, "Well, Johnny Pye, the Fool-Killer ought to be along for you most any

day now. For I never did see a boy that was such a fool." Then he'd looked to the miller's wife to see if she believed it, too—but she just shook her head and looked serious. So he went to bed that night, but he couldn't sleep—for every time a bough rustled or the mill-wheel creaked, it seemed to him it must be the Fool-Killer. And early next morning, before anybody was up, he packed such duds as he had in a bandanna handkerchief and ran away.

He didn't really expect to get away from the Fool-Killer very long—as far as he knew, the Fool-Killer got you wherever you went. But he thought he'd give him a run for his money, at least. And when he got on the road, it was a bright Spring morning, and the first peace and quiet he'd had in some time. So his spirits rose, and he chunked a stone at a bullfrog as he went along—just to show he was Johnny Pye and still doing business.

He hadn't gone more than three or four miles out of Martinsville, when he heard a buggy coming up the road behind him. He knew the Fool-Killer didn't need a buggy to catch you, so he wasn't afraid of it, but he stepped to the side of the road to let it pass. But it stopped, instead, and a black-whiskered man with a stovepipe hat looked out of it.

"Hello, Bub," he said, "is this the road for East Liberty?"

"My name's John Pye and I'm eleven years old," said Johnny, polite but firm, "and you take the next left fork for East Liberty. They say it's a pretty town—I've never been there myself." And he sighed a little, because he thought he'd like to see the world before the Fool-Killer caught up with him.

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"H'm," said the man. "Stranger here too, eh? And what brings a smart boy like you on the road so early in the morning?"

"Oh!" said Johnny Pye, quite honestly, "I'm running away from the Fool-Killer. For the miller says I'm a fool and his wife says I'm a fool and almost everybody in Martinsville says I'm a fool except little Susy Marsh. And the miller says the Fool-Killer's after me—so I thought I'd run away before he came."

The black-whiskered man sat in his buggy and wheezed for a while. When he got his breath back, "Well, jump in, Bub," he said. "The miller may say you're a fool, but I think you're a right smart boy to be running away from the Fool-Killer all by yourself. And I don't hold with small town prejudices, and I need a right smart boy—so I'll give you a lift on the road."

"But will I be safe from the Fool-Killer if I'm with you?" said Johnny. "For otherwise, it don't signify."

"Safe?" said the black-whiskered man, and wheezed again. "Oh, you'll be safe as houses. You see, I'm a herb-doctor—and some folks think, a little in the Fool-Killer's line of business, myself. And I'll teach you a trade worth two of milling. So jump in, Bub."

"Sounds all right the way you say it," said Johnny. "But my name's John Pye," and he jumped into the buggy. And they went rattling along toward East Liberty with the herb-doctor talking and cutting jokes till Johnny thought he'd never met a pleasanter man. About half a mile from East Liberty, the doctor stopped at a spring.

"What are we stopping here for?" said Johnny Pye.

"Wait and see," said the doctor, and gave him a wink. Then he got a hair cloth trunk full of empty

bottles out of the back of the buggy and made Johnny fill them with spring water and label them. Then he added a pinch of pink powder to each bottle and shook them up and corked them and stowed them away.

"What's that?" said Johnny, very interested.

"That's Old Dr. Waldo's Unparalleled Universal Remedy," said the doctor, reading from the label. "Made from the purest snake-oil and secret Indian herbs, it cures rheumatism, blind staggers, headache, malaria, five kinds of fits and spots in front of the eyes. It will also remove oil or grease stains, clean knives and silver, polish brass and is strongly recommended as a general tonic and blood-purifier. Small size, one dollar —family bottle, two dollars and a half."

"But I don't see any snake-oil in it," said Johnny, puzzled. "Or any secret Indian herbs."

"That's because you're not a fool," said the doctor, with another wink. "The Fool-Killer wouldn't either. But most folks will."

And, that very same night, Johnny saw. For the doctor made his pitch in East Liberty and he did it handsome. He took a couple of flaring oil-torches and stuck them on the sides of the buggy; he put on a diamond stick-pin and did card-tricks and told funny stories till he had the crowd goggle-eyed. As for Johnny, he let him play on the tambourine. Then he started talking about Dr. Waldo's Universal Remedy, and, with Johnny to help him, the bottles went like hot cakes. Johnny helped the doctor count the money afterwards—and it was a pile.

"Well," said Johnny, "I never saw money made easier. You've got a fine trade, doctor."

"It's cleverness does it," said the doctor and slapped him on the back. "Now a fool's content to stay in one

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place and do one thing. But the Fool-Killer never caught up with a good pitchman yet."

"Well, it's certainly lucky I met up with you," said Johnny. "And, if it's cleverness does it, I'll learn the trade or bust."

So he stayed with the doctor quite a while—in fact till he could make up the remedy and do the card-tricks almost as good as the doctor himself. And Johnny admired the doctor and the doctor liked Johnny—for Johnny was a biddable boy. But one night, they came into a town where things didn't go as they usually did. The crowd gathered as usual, and the doctor did his tricks. But all the time Johnny could see a sharp-faced little fellow going through the crowd and whispering to one man and another. Till, at last, right in the middle of the doctor's spiel, the sharp-faced fellow gave a shout of "That's him all right! I'd know them whiskers anywhere!" and, with that, the crowd growled once and began to tear slats out of the nearest fence. Well, the next thing Johnny knew, he and the doctor were being ridden out of town on a rail, with the doctor's long coat-tails flying at every jounce.

They didn't hurt Johnny particular—him only being a boy. But they warned 'em both never to show their faces in that town again—and then they heaved the doctor into a thistle patch and went their ways.

"Owoo!" said the doctor. "Ouch!" as Johnny was helping him out of the thistle-patch. "Go easy with those thistles! And why didn't you give me the office, you blame little fool?"

"Office?" said Johnny. "What office?"

"When that sharp-nosed man started snooping around," said the doctor. "I thought that infernal

main street looked familiar—I was through there two years ago, selling solid gold watches for a dollar apiece."

"But the works to a solid gold watch would be worth more than that," said Johnny.

"There weren't any works," said the doctor, with a groan. "But there was a nice lively beetle inside each case and it made the prettiest tick you ever heard."

"Well, that certainly was a clever idea," said Johnny. "I'd never have thought of that."

"Clever?" said the doctor. "Ouch—it was ruination! But who'd have thought the fools would bear a grudge for two years? And now we've lost the horse and buggy, too—not to speak of the bottles and the money. Well, there's lots more tricks to be played and we'll start again."

But, though he liked the doctor, Johnny began to feel dubious, for it occurred to him that, if all the doctor's cleverness got him was being ridden out of town on a rail, he couldn't be so far away from the Fool-Killer as he thought. And, sure enough, as he was going to sleep that night, he seemed to hear the Fool-Killer's footsteps coming after him—step, step, step. He pulled his jacket up over his ears, but he couldn't shut it out. So, when the doctor had got in the way of starting business over again, he and Johnny parted company. The doctor didn't bear any grudge; he shook hands with Johnny and told him to remember that cleverness was power. And Johnny went on with his running away. He got to a town, and there was a store with a sign in the window, "Boy wanted," so he went in.

There, sure enough, was the merchant, sitting at his desk, and a fine, important man he looked, in his black

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broadcloth suit. Johnny tried to tell him about the Fool-Killer, but the merchant wasn't interested in that. He just looked Johnny over and saw that he looked biddable and strong for his age. "But, remember—no fooling around, boy!" said the merchant sternly, after he'd hired him.

"No fooling around?" said Johnny, with the light of hope in his eyes.

"No," said the merchant, meaningly. "We've no room for fools in this business—I can tell you that! You work hard, and you'll rise. But, if you've got any foolish notions, just knock them on the head and forget them."

Well, Johnny was glad enough to promise that, and he stayed with the merchant a year and a half. He swept out the store, and he put the shutters up and took them down, he ran errands and wrapped up packages and learned to keep busy twelve hours a day. And, being a biddable boy and an honest one, he rose, just like the merchant had said. The merchant raised his wages and let him begin to wait on customers, learn accounts. And then, one night, Johnny woke up in the middle of the night. And it seemed to him he heard—far away but getting nearer—the steps of the Fool-Killer after him—tramping, tramping.

He went to the merchant next day and said, "Sir, I'm sorry to tell you this. But I'll have to be moving on."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that, Johnny," said the merchant. "For you've been a good boy. And, if it's a question of salary——"

"It's isn't that," said Johnny. "But tell me one thing, sir, if you don't mind my asking. Supposing I did stay with you—where would I end?"

The merchant smiled.

"That's a hard question to answer," he said. "And I'm not much given to compliments. But I started myself as a boy, sweeping out the store. And you're a bright youngster with lots of go-ahead. I don't see why, if you stuck to it, you shouldn't make the same kind of success that I have."

"And what's that?" said Johnny.

The merchant began to look irritated, but he kept his smile.

"Well," he said, "I'm not a boastful man. But I'll tell you this. Ten years ago I was the richest man in town. Five years ago, I was the richest man in the county. And five years from now—well, I am to be the richest man in the State."

His eyes kind of glittered as he said it, but Johnny was looking at his face. It was sallow-skinned and pouchy, with the jaw as hard as a rock. And it came upon Johnny that moment that, though he'd known the merchant a year and a half, he'd never really seen him enjoy himself except when he was driving a bargain.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "But, if it's like that, I'll certainly have to go. Because, you see, I'm running away from the Fool-Killer, and, if I stayed here and got to be like you, he'd certainly catch up with me in no——"

"Why, you impudent young cub!" roared the merchant, with his face gone red all of a sudden. "Get your money from the cashier!" and Johnny found himself on the road again before you could say "Jack Robinson." But this time he was used to it, and walked off whistling.

Well, after that he hired out to quite a few different people—but I won't go into all of his adventures. He

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worked for an inventor for a while—and they split up because Johnny happened to ask him what would be the good of his patent, self-winding, perpetual-motion machine, once he did get it invented. And, while the inventor talked big about improving the human race and the beauties of science, it was plain he didn't know. So that night Johnny heard the steps of the Fool-Killer, far off but coming closer—and next morning he went away. Then he stayed with a minister for a while—and he certainly hated to leave him, for the minister was a good man. But they got talking one evening, and, as it chanced, Johnny asked him what happened to people who didn't believe in his particular religion. Well, the minister was broad-minded, but there's only one answer to that. He admitted they might be good folks—he even admitted they mightn't exactly go to hell—but he couldn't let them into heaven; no, not the best and the wisest of them, for there were the specifications laid down by creed and church, and, if you didn't fulfil them, you didn't.

So Johnny had to leave him, and after that he went with an old drunken fiddler for a while. He wasn't a good man, I guess—but he could play till the tears ran down your cheeks. And, when he was playing his best, it seemed to Johnny that the Fool-Killer was very far away. For, in spite of his faults and his weaknesses, while he played there was might in the man. But he died drunk in a ditch, one night, with Johnny to hold his head, and, while he left Johnny his fiddle, it didn't do Johnny much good. For, while Johnny could play a tune, he couldn't play like the fiddler—it wasn't in his fingers.

Then it chanced that Johnny took up with a company of soldiers. He was still too young to enlist, but they

made a kind of pet of him, and everything went swimmingly for a while. For the captain was the bravest man Johnny had ever seen, and he had an answer for everything out of regulations and the articles of war. But then they went West to fight Indians and the same old trouble cropped up again. For one night the captain said to him, "Johnny, we're going to fight the enemy to-morrow. But you'll stay in camp."

"Oh, I don't want to do that," said Johnny. "I want to be in on the fighting."

"It's an order," said the captain grimly. Then he gave Johnny certain instructions and a letter to take to his wife.

"For the colonel's a copper-plated fool," he said. "And we're walking straight into an ambush."

"Why don't you tell him that?" said Johnny.

"I have," said the captain. "But he's the colonel."

"Colonel or no colonel," said Johnny. "If he's a fool, somebody ought to stop him."

"You can't do that in an army," said the captain. "Orders are orders."

But it turned out the captain was wrong about it, for next day, before they could get moving, the Indians attacked at dawn, and got badly licked. When it was all over,

"Well, it was a good fight," said the captain, professionally. "All the same, if they'd waited and laid an ambush, they'd have had our hair. But, as it was, they didn't stand a chance."

"But why didn't they lay an ambush?" said Johnny.

"Well," said the captain. "I guess they had their orders, too. And now, how would you like to be a soldier?"

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"Well, it's a nice outdoors life but I'd like to think it over," said Johnny. For he knew the captain was brave and he knew the Indians had been brave—you couldn't find two braver sets of people. But, all the same, when he thought the whole thing over, he seemed to hear steps in the sky. So he soldiered to the end of the campaign and then he left the army, though the captain told him he was making a mistake.

By now, of course, he wasn't a boy any longer; he was getting to be a young man with a young man's thoughts and feelings. And half the time nowadays, he'd forget about the Fool-Killer except as a dream he'd had when he was a boy. He could even laugh at it now and then and think what a fool he'd been to believe there was such a man.

But all the same, the desire in him wasn't satisfied and something kept driving him on. He'd have called it ambitiousness now, but it came to the same thing. And with every new trade he tried, sooner or later would come the dream—the dream of the big man in the checked shirt and corduroy pants, walking the ways of the world with his hickory stick in one hand. It made him angry to have that dream now, but it had a singular power over him. Till finally, when he was turned twenty or so, he got scared.

"Fool-Killer or no Fool-Killer," he said to himself, "I've got to ravel this matter out. For there must be some one thing a man could tie to and be sure he wasn't a fool. I've tried cleverness and money and half a dozen other things—and they don't seem to be the answer. So now I'll try book-learning and see what comes of that."

So he read all the books he could find, and whenever

he'd seem to hear the steps of the Fool-Killer coming for the authors—and that was frequent—he'd try and shut his ears. But some books said one thing was best and some another, and he couldn't rightly decide.

"Well," he said to himself, when he'd read and read till his head felt as stuffed with book-learning as a sausage with meat, "it's interesting but it isn't exactly contemporaneous. So I think I'll go down to Washington and ask the wise men there. For it must take a lot of wisdom to run a country like the United States—and if there's people who can answer my questions, it's there they ought to be found."

So he packed his bag and off to Washington he went. He was modest, for a youngster, and he didn't intend to try and see the President right away. He thought probably a congressman was about his size. So he saw a congressman, and the congressman told him the thing to be was an upstanding young American and vote the Republican ticket—which sounded all right to Johnny Pye, but not exactly what he was after.

Then he went to a senator and the senator told him to be an upstanding young American and vote the Democratic ticket—which sounded all right, too, but not what he was after, either. And, somehow, though both men had been impressive and affable, right in the middle of their speeches, he'd seemed to hear steps—you know.

But a man has to eat, whatever else he does, and Johnny found he'd better buckle down and get himself a job. It happened to be with the first congressman he struck—for that one came from Martinsville, which is why Johnny went to him in the first place. And, in a little while, he forgot his search entirely and the

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Fool-Killer too—for the congressman's niece came East to visit him, and she was the Susy Marsh that Johnny had sat next in school. She'd been pretty then, but she was prettier now, and as soon as Johnny Pye saw her, his heart gave a jump and a thump.

"And don't think we don't remember you in Martinsville, Johnny Pye," she said, when her uncle had explained who his new clerk was. "Why, the whole town'll be excited when I write home. We've heard all about your killing Indians and inventing perpetual motion and travelling around the country with a famous doctor and making a fortune in drygoods and—oh, it's a wonderful story!"

"Well," said Johnny, and coughed, "some of that's just a little bit exaggerated. But it's nice of you to be interested. So they don't think I'm a fool any more in Martinsville?"

"I never thought you were a fool," said Susy with a little smile, and Johnny felt his heart give another bump.

"And I always knew you were pretty but never how pretty till now," said Johnny, and coughed again. "But speaking of old times, how's the miller and his wife? For I did leave them right sudden, and while there were faults on both sides, I must have been a trial to them, too."

"They've gone the way of all flesh," said Susy Marsh. "And there's a new miller, now. But he isn't very well-liked, to tell the truth, and he's letting the mill run down."

"That's a pity," said Johnny. "For it was a likely mill." Then he began to ask her more questions and she began to remember things, too. Well, you know how the time can go when two youngsters get talking like that.

Johnny Pye never worked so hard in his life as he did that winter. And it wasn't the Fool-Killer he thought about—it was Susy Marsh. First he thought she loved him and then he was sure she didn't—and then he was betwixt and between and all perplexed and confused. But finally it turned out all right and he had her promise, and Johnny Pye knew he was the happiest man in the world. And that night he waked up in the night and heard the Fool-Killer coming after him—step, step, step.

He didn't sleep much, after that, and he came down to breakfast hollow-eyed. But his uncle-to-be didn't notice that—he was rubbing his hands and smiling.

"Put on your best necktie, Johnny!" he said, very cheerful. "For I've got an appointment with the President to-day, and, just to show I approve of my niece's *fiancé*, I'm taking you along."

"The President!" said Johnny, all dumbfounded.

"Yes," said Congressman Marsh. "You see, there's a little bill—well, we needn't go into that. But slick down your back-hair, Johnny—we'll make Martinsville proud of us this day!"

Then a weight seemed to go from Johnny's shoulders and a load from his heart. He wrung the congressman's hand.

"Thank you, Uncle Eben!" he said. "I can't thank you enough. "For, at last, he knew he was going to look upon a man that was bound to be safe from the Fool-Killer—and it seemed to him if he could just once do that, all his troubles and searchings would be ended.

Well, it doesn't signify which President it was—you can take it from me that he was President and a fine-looking man. He'd just been elected, too, so he was lively as a trout, and the saddle-galls he'd get from

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Congress hadn't even begun to show. Anyhow, there he was, and Johnny feasted his eyes on him. For if there was anybody in the country the Fool-Killer couldn't bother, it must be a man like this.

The President and the congressman talked politics for a while, and then it was Johnny's turn.

"Well, young man," said the President, affably. "And what can I do for you—for you look to me like a fine, upstanding young American."

The congressman cut in quick before Johnny could open his mouth.

"Just a word of advice, Mr. President," he said. "Just a word in season. For my young friend's led an adventurous life—but now he's going to marry my niece and settle down. And what he needs most of all is a word of ripe wisdom from you."

"Well," said the President, looking at Johnny rather keenly, "if that's all he needs, a short horse is soon curried. I wish most of my callers wanted as little."

But, all the same, he drew Johnny out, as such men can, and before Johnny knew it, he was telling his life-story.

"Well," said the President, at the end, "you certainly have been a rolling stone, young man. But there's nothing wrong in that. And for one of your varied experience—there's one obvious career. Politics!" he said and slapped his fist in his hand.

"Well," said Johnny, scratching his head. "Of course, since I've been in Washington, I've thought of that. But I don't know that I'm rightly fitted."

"You can write a speech," said Congressman Marsh, quite thoughtful. "For you've helped me with mine. You're a likeable fellow, too. And you were born poor

and worked up—and you've even got a war-record—why, hell!—excuse me, Mr. President!—he's worth five hundred votes just as he stands!"

"I—I'm more than honoured by you two gentlemen," said Johnny, abashed and flattered. "But supposing I did go into politics—where would I end up?"

The President looked sort of modest.

"The Presidency of the United States," said he, "is within the legitimate ambition of every American citizen. Provided he can get elected, of course."

"Oh," said Johnny, feeling dazzled, "I never thought of that. Well, that's a great thing. But it must be a great responsibility, too."

"It is," said the President, looking just like his pictures on the campaign buttons.

"Why, it must be an awful responsibility!" said Johnny. "I can't hardly see how a mortal man can bear it. Tell me, Mr. President," he said. "May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," said the President, looking prouder and more responsible and more and more like his picture on the campaign buttons every minute.

"Well," said Johnny, "it sounds like a fool question, but it's this. This is a great big country of ours, Mr. President, and it's got the most amazing lot of different people in it. Now can any President satisfy all those people at one time? Can you yourself, Mr. President?"

The President looked a bit taken aback for a minute. But then he gave Johnny Pye a statesman's glance.

"With the help of God," he said, solemnly. "And in accordance with the principles of our great party, I intend——"

But Johnny didn't even hear the end of the sentence.

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For, even as the President was speaking, he heard a step outside in the corridor and he knew, somehow, it wasn't the step of a secretary or a guard. He was glad the President had said, "with the help of God," for that sort of softened the step. And then the President finished. Johnny bowed.

"Thank you, Mr. President," he said. "That's what I wanted to know. And now I'll go back to Martinsville, I guess."

"Go back to Martinsville?" said the President, surprised.

"Yes, sir," said Johnny. "For I don't think I'm cut out for politics."

"And is that all you have to say to the President of the United States?" said his uncle-to-be, in a fume.

But the President had been thinking, meanwhile—and he was a bigger man than the congressman.

"Wait a minute, Congressman," he said. "This young man's honest, at least, and I like his looks. Moreover, of all the people who've come to see me in the last six months, he's the only one who hasn't wanted something—except the White House cat, and I guess she wanted something, too, because she meowed. You don't want to be President, young man—and, confidentially, I don't blame you. But how would you like to be postmaster at Martinsville?"

"Postmaster?" said Johnny. "But——"

"Oh, it's only a tenth-class post office," said the President. "But, for once in my life, I'll do something because I want to do it, and let Congress yell its head off. Come—is it yes or no?"

Johnny thought of all the places he'd been and all the trades he'd worked at. He thought, queerly enough,

of the old drunk fiddler dead in the ditch—but he knew he couldn't be that. Mostly, though, he thought of Martinsville and Susy Marsh. And, though he'd just heard the Fool-Killer's step, he defied the Fool-Killer.

"Why, it's yes, of course, Mr. President," he said.
"For then I can marry Susy."

"That's as good a reason as you'll find," said the President. "And now, I'll just write a note."

Well, he was as good as his word, and Johnny and his Susy were married and went back to live in Martinsville. And, as soon as Johnny learned the ways of postmastering, he found it as good a trade as most. There wasn't much mail in Martinsville, but inbetween-whiles, he ran the mill, and that was a good trade, too. And all the time, he knew, at the back of his mind, that he hadn't quite settled accounts with the Fool-Killer. But he didn't much care about that, for he and Susy were happy. And, after a while, they had a child, and that was the most remarkable experience that had ever happened to any young couple, though the doctor said it was a perfectly normal baby.

One evening, when his son was about a year old, Johnny Pye took the river road, going home. It was a mite longer than the hill road, but it was the cool of the evening, and there's times when a man likes to walk by himself, fond as he may be of his wife and family.

, He was thinking of the way things had turned out for him—and they seemed to him pretty astonishing and singular, as they do to most folks, when you think them over. In fact, he was thinking so hard that, before he knew it, he'd almost stumbled over an old scissors-grinder who'd set up his grindstone and tools by the side of the road. The scissors-grinder had his

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cart with him but he'd turned the horse out to graze—and a lank, old white horse it was, with every rib showing. And he was very busy, putting an edge on a scythe.

"Oh, sorry," said Johnny Pye, "I didn't know anybody was camping here. But you might come round to my house to-morrow—my wife's got some knives that need sharpening."

Then he stopped, for the old man gave him a long, keen look.

"Why, it's you, Johnny Pye," said the old man. "And how do you do, Johnny Pye ! You've been a long time coming—in fact, now and then I thought I'd have to fetch you. But you're here at last."

Johnny Pye was a grown man now, but he began to tremble.

"But it isn't you !" he said, wildly. "I mean you're not him ! Why, I've known how he looks all my life ! He's a big man, with a checked shirt, and he carries a hickory stick with a lump of lead in one end."

"Oh no," said the scissors-grinder, quite quiet. "You may have thought of me that way, but that's not the way I am." And Johnny Pye heard the scythe go whet-whet—whet on the stone. The old man ran some water on it and looked at the edge. Then he shook his head as if the edge didn't quite satisfy him. "Well, Johnny, are you ready ?" he said, after a while.

"Ready ?" said Johnny, in a hoarse voice. "Of course I'm not ready."

"That's what they all say," said the old man, nodding his head, and the scythe went whet-whet on the stone.

Johnny wiped his brow and started to argue it out.

"You see, if you'd found me earlier !" he said. "Or

later ! I don't want to be unreasonable. But I've got a wife and a child."

"Most have wives and many have children," said the old man, grimly, and the scythe went whet-whet on the stone as he pushed the treadle. And a shower of sparks flew, very clear, and bright, for the night had begun to fall.

"Oh, stop that damn racket and let a man think for a minute !" said Johnny, desperate. "I can't go, I tell you. I won't. It isn't time. It's——"

The old man stopped the grindstone and pointed with the scythe at Johnny Pye.

"Tell me one good reason," he said. "There's men would be missed in the world—but are you one of them ? A clever man might be missed. But are you a clever man ?"

"No," said Johnny, thinking of the herb-doctor, "I had a chance to be clever, but I gave it up."

"One," said the old man, ticking off on his fingers. "Well, a rich man might be missed—by some. But you aren't rich, I take it."

"No," said Johnny, thinking of the merchant. "Nor wanted to be."

"Two," said the old man. "Cleverness—riches—they're done. But there's still martial bravery and being a hero. There might be an argument to make, if you were one of these."

Johnny Pye shuddered a little, remembering the way that battlefield had looked, out West, when the Indians were dead and the fight over.

"No," he said, "I've fought. But I'm not a hero."

"Well then, there's religion," said the old man, sort of patient. "And science and—but, what's the use ? We know what you did with those. I might feel a trifle

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of compunction if I had to deal with a President of the United States. But——”

“Oh, you know well enough I ain’t President,” said Johnny, with a groan. “Can’t you get it over with and be done?”

“You’re not putting up a very good case,” said the old man, shaking his head. “I’m surprised at you, Johnny. Here you spend your youth running away from being a fool. And yet, what’s the first thing you do, when you’re man grown? Why, you marry a girl, settle down in your home town, and start raising children when you don’t know how they’ll turn out. You might have known I’d catch up with you, then—you just put yourself in my way.”

“Fool I may be,” said Johnny Pye, in his agony. “And if you take it like that, I guess we’re all fools. But Susy’s my wife and my child’s my child. And as for work in the world—well, somebody has to be postmaster or folks wouldn’t get the mail.”

“Would it matter much if they didn’t?” said the old man, pointing his scythe.

“Well, no, I don’t suppose it would, considering what’s on the postcards,” said Johnny Pye. “But, while it’s my business to sort it, I’ll sort it as well as I can.”

The old man whetted his scythe so hard that a long shower of sparks flew out on the grass.

“Well,” he said, “I’ve got my job, too, and I do it likewise. But I’ll tell you what I’ll do. You’re coming my way, no doubt of it, but, looking you over, you don’t look quite ripe yet. So I’ll let you off for a while. For that matter,” said he, “if you’ll answer one question of mine—how a man can be a human being and not be a fool—I’ll let you off permanent. It’ll be the first time

in history," he said. "But you've got to do something on your own hook, once in a while. And now you can walk along, Johnny Pye."

With that he ground the scythe till the sparks flew out like the tail of a comet and Johnny Pye walked along. The air of the meadow had never seemed so sweet to him before.

All the same, even with his relief, he didn't quite forget, and sometimes Susy had to tell the children not to disturb Father because he was thinking. But Time went ahead, as it does, and pretty soon Johnny Pye found he was forty. He'd never expected to be forty, when he was young, and it kind of surprised him. But there it was, though he couldn't say he felt much different, except now and then when he stooped over. And he was a solid citizen of the town, well-liked and well-respected, with a growing family and a stake in the community—and when he thought those things over, they kind of surprised him, too. But, pretty soon, it was as if things had always been that way.

It was after his eldest son had been drowned out fishing that Johnny Pye met the scissors-grinder again. But this time he was bitter and distracted, and, if he could have got to the old man, he'd have done him a mortal harm. But, howehow or other, when he tried to come to grips with him, it was like reaching for air and mist. He could see the sparks fly from the ground scythe but he couldn't even touch the wheel.

"You coward!" said Johnny Pye. "Stand up and fight like a man!" But the old man just nodded his head and the wheel kept grinding and grinding.

"Why couldn't you have taken me?" said Johnny Pye, as if those words had never been said before.

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"What's the sense in all this? Why can't you take me now?"

Then he tried to wrench the scythe from the old man's hands, but he couldn't touch it. And then he fell down and lay on the grass for a while.

"Time passes," said the old man, nodding his head.
"Time passes."

"It will never cure the grief I have for my son," said Johnny Pye.

"It will not," said the old man, nodding his head.
"But time passes. Would you leave your wife a widow and your other children fatherless for the sake of your grief?"

"No, God help me!" said Johnny Pye. "That wouldn't be right for a man."

"Then go home to your house, Johnny Pye," said the old man. And Johnny Pye went, but there were lines in his face that hadn't been there before.

And Time passed, like the flow of the river, and Johnny Pye's children married and had houses and children of their own. And Susy's hair grew white and her back grew bent, and when Johnny Pye and his children followed her to her grave, folks said she'd died in the fullness of years, but that was hard for Johnny Pye to believe. Only folks didn't talk as plain as they used to, and the sun didn't heat as much, and sometimes, before dinner, he'd go to sleep in his chair.

And once, after Susy had died, the President of those days came through Martinsville, and Johnny Pye shook hands with him, and there was a piece in the paper about his shaking hands with two Presidents, fifty years apart. Johnny Pye cut out the clipping and kept it in his pocket-book. He liked this President all right,

but, as he told people, he wasn't a patch on the other one, fifty years ago. Well, you couldn't expect it—you didn't have Presidents these days, not to call them Presidents. All the same, he took a lot of satisfaction in the clipping.

He didn't get down to the river road much any more—it wasn't too long a walk, of course, but he just didn't often feel like it. But, one day, he slipped away from the granddaughter that was taking care of him, and went. It was kind of a steep road, really—he didn't remember it's being so steep.

"Well," said the scissors-grinder. "And good-afternoon to you, Johnny Pye."

"You'll have to talk a little louder," said Johnny Pye. "My hearing's perfect but folks don't speak as plain as they used to. Stranger in town?"

"Oh, so that's the way it is," said the scissors-grinder.

"Yes, that's the way it is," said Johnny Pye. He knew he ought to be afraid of this fellow, now he'd put on his spectacles and got a good look at him. But, for the life of him, he couldn't remember why.

"I know just who you are," he said, a little fretfully. "Never forgot a face in my life—and your name's right on the tip of my tongue—"

"Oh, don't bother about names," said the scissors-grinder. "We're old acquaintances. And I asked you a question, years ago—do you remember that?"

"Yes," said Johnny Pye, "I remember." Then he began to laugh—a high, old man's laugh. "And of all the fool questions I ever was asked," he said, "that certainly took the cake."

"Oh ?" said the scissors-grinder.

"Uh-huh," said Johnny Pye. "For you asked me

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how a man could be a human being and yet not be a fool. And the answer is—when he's dead and gone and buried. Any fool would know that."

"That so?" said the scissors-grinder.

"Of course," said Johnny Pye. "I ought to know. I'll be ninety-two next November and I've shook hands with two Presidents. The first President I shook——"

"I'll be interested to hear about that," said the scissors-grinder. "But we've got a little business first. For, if all human beings are fools—how does the world get ahead?"

"Oh, there's lots of other things," said Johnny Pye, kind of impatient. "There's the brave and the wise and the clever—and they're apt to roll it ahead as much as an inch. But it's all mixed in together. For, Lord, it's only some fool kind of creature that would have crawled out of the sea to dry land in the first place—or get dropped from the Garden of Eden, if you like it better that way. You can't depend on the kind of folks people think they are—you've got to go by what they do. And I wouldn't give much for a man that some folks hadn't thought was a fool, in his time."

"Well," said the scissors-grinder, "you've answered my question—at least as well as you could—which is all you can expect of a man. So I'll keep my part of the bargain."

"And what was that?" said Johnny Pye. "For, while it's all straight in my head, I don't quite recollect the details."

"Why," said the scissors-grinder, rather testy, "I'm to let you go, you old fool! You'll never see me again till the last Judgment. There'll be trouble in the office about it," said he, "but you've got to do what you like, once in a while."

"Phew!" said Johnny Pye. "That needs thinking over!" And he scratched his head.

"Why?" said the scissors-grinder, a bit affronted. "It ain't often I offer a man eternal life."

"Well," said Johnny Pye, "I take it very kind. But, you see, it's this way." He thought for a moment. "No," he said, "you wouldn't understand. You can't have touched seventy yet, by your looks, and no young man would."

"Try me," said the scissors-grinder.

"Well," said Johnny Pye, "*it's this way*," and he scratched his head again. "I'm not saying—if you'd made the offer forty years ago. Or even twenty. But, well, now, let's just take one detail. Let's say 'teeth'."

"Well, of course—" said the scissors-grinder. "Naturally—I mean you could hardly expect me to do anything about that."

"I thought so," said Johnny Pye. "Well, you see, these are good, bought teeth, but I'm sort of tired of hearing them click. And spectacles, I suppose, the same?"

"I'm afraid so," said the scissors-grinder. "I can't interfere with Time, you know—that's not my department. And, frankly, you couldn't expect, at a hundred and eighty, let's say, to be quite the man you was at ninety. But still, you'd be a wonder!"

"Maybe so," said Johnny Pye. "But, you see—well, the truth is, I'm an old man now—you wouldn't think it to look at me but it's so. And my friends—well, they're gone—and Susy and the boy—and somehow you don't get as close to the younger people, except the children. And to keep on just going and going till Judgment Day, with nobody around to talk to that

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had real horse sense—well, no sir, it's a handsome offer but I just don't feel up to accepting it. It may not be patriotic of me, and I feel sorry for Martinsville. It'd do wonders for the climate and the Chamber of Commerce to have a leading citizen live till Judgment Day. But a man's got to do as he likes, at least once in his life." He stopped and looked at the scissors-grinder. "I'll admit, I'd kind of like to beat out Ike Leavis," he said. "To hear him talk, you'd think nobody had ever pushed ninety before. But I suppose——"

"I'm afraid we can't issue a limited policy," said the scissors-grinder.

"Well," said Johnny Pye, "I just thought of it. And Ike's all right." He waited a moment. "Tell me," he said, in a low voice. "Well, you know what I mean. Afterwards. I mean, if you're likely to see"—he coughed—"your friends again. I mean, if it's so."

"I can't tell you that," said the scissors-grinder. "I only go so far."

"Well, there's no harm in asking," said Johnny Pye, rather humbly. He peered into the darkness; a last shower of sparks flew from the scythe, then the whirr of the wheel stopped.

"H'm," said Johnny Pye, testing the edge. "That's a well-ground scythe. But they used to grind 'em better in the old days." He listened and looked, for a moment, anxiously. "Oh Lordy!" he said. "There's Helen coming to look for me. She'll take me back to the house."

"Not this time," said the scissors-grinder. "Yes, there isn't bad steel in that scythe. Well, let's go, Johnny Pye."

Andalusian Rhapsody

BY GUY DENT

It was nice weather up there at Ronda. Stretched out in an hotel chair with my feet on the low parapet of the garden I lay at ease. We had been doing a tour of Southern Spain. Going by bus when there were any, but mostly on foot, we had covered quite a distance. This was our first real rest in weeks and we were pretty tired.

We had only been a few hours in the place, but already I felt refreshed.

In Spain by the end of May the sun has power. We had caught it a lot down in the lowlands; but up here amongst the mountains it was different.

Here the air was keen and clear and the great birds swam with ease and certainty.

It was nice weather at Ronda and the flowers were out.

My wife came out of the hotel and took the chair beside me. She sat down very fast.

The sun was warm on my stomach. I stretched out till my feet hung right over the valley the other side of the wall. Pleasantly relaxed, I glanced down at the sea of blue flowers which lapped our chairs. The flowers were blue, close-growing and short of stem. Their surface was smoothly unbroken. I let one hand trail in their smooth, warm waves.

The swift screamed across the azure sky. There was an air of peace and dishevelment about Ronda in those

days. One could let go and sleep in the open. That, of course, was before the Civil War.

"There were a lot of letters," said my wife.

A large butterfly, white and orange, sat on the toe of one of my shoes and began to fan itself. Its wings were slashed with green. It opened and shut its wings with delicate precision, quivering with love.

I listened to the sound of my wife speaking and I sighed.

I peeped sideways to see what she was doing with her left hand, and then I tightened my stomach.

"I wouldn't know what it's going to be about," I said.

My wife looked at me, her eyes misty with pain, hate and Heaven knows what other emotions. "Your women," she said bitterly. "Leaving their letters about. In our bedroom," she said. "They stink," she said.

I waggled my toe and the butterfly rose up all in one piece. It sailed about like a gaudy chocolate-wrapping teased by a small wind, then settled in the same place.

There were a lot of things to say. There were so many things to say that I couldn't choose.

"Whore," said my wife. "That's what she is. A vulgar little twopenny tip."

"No," I said.

"Cheap, horrible smelling letters," said my wife, "in our bedroom. For Heaven's sake."

"If you don't stop doing that," I said, "you'll hurt your finger."

"The way you discuss me with her," she said.

"You'd know all about that," I said, "naturally."

"Listen," said my wife.

I listened for quite a while. Then I got up and went

and leaned my elbows on the low parapet. The bricks were warm to my touch. Even through my shirt sleeves I could feel the stored heat of them.

The butterfly slanted to and fro in the warm air. It was annoyed, I thought. Bewildered, I thought. So unexpectedly, it said, as it floated to and fro seeking, and the world is upset and one has to find a new place. A careless God.

But I wasn't looking at it.

Away and away across the valley the mountains crouched like lions. Through the clear air I could clearly see the ripples in their tawny hides. They were frozen with grief and the valley curved beneath their weight.

Below me there was nothing. Nothing at all for hundreds and hundreds of feet. Just the birds striving after the evening hatch of flies.

Then, far and far below was the green carpet of the valley. A silver river lay like a ribbon across the green valley, and a woman in a red petticoat walked beside.

Somewhere, out of sight, a train screamed, filling the ancient valley with new pain.

"That's all right," I said. "That's perfectly all right. You've been calling me that every few months for years."

"Listen," said my wife.

"Conversations on a Spanish mountain," I said, "old stuff in new settings. We ought to suit them to the country."

Then I saw the guide. He had come up and was standing quite close. He was all in black and had a wide black hat. His shoes were white with dust. But where the hem of his trousers rubbed them was a line as firm and

artificial as a plimsoll. His shoes were black. He stood there and watched us with respectful wickedness.

"We've seen it all," I said.

"Even the Fourteenth Century house down by the bridge?"

"All."

"But not the house."

"All. We've seen all."

"How much did you pay?"

"Five Pesetas."

"You paid five! and you haven't seen the house! For three I shew you everything. The Bull Ring; the English painter, and the old house by the bridge."

"What's he saying?" said my wife.

"He wants to shew us the Bull Ring."

"Oh, I do want to see the Ring," said my wife. "Bull Ring," she said, waving her hand at the guide.

"They've just brought in the bulls for to-morrow's fight," said the guide earnestly.

He was intensely respectable and depraved.

"There's a fight to-morrow," said the guide, "and the bulls are just up."

"Good," I said. "I thought the fight was to-night."

He looked puzzled but charming.

"I shan't need a hat," said my wife. "Not now. It's quite cool now, so I can go without."

We started off. We walked slowly and without cohesion. Anyone could see it was all hollow between my wife and I. We paid great attention to our own walking. It was quite different now between my wife and I; it was like stained glass windows in a lightless church.

There were only two bulls. They were pretty lively. They were thin, with large heads and horns like pitchforks. But they moved about a lot.

Men dashed around and shouted at them.

When a bull ran at a man the man skipped behind a sort of cubicle and the bull only ripped wood.

The men were quite smart at getting into these gents' retiring places; and after a while the bulls gave it up.

One bull had a smack at a heavy-looking companion with a bell hanging round its neck. He hit him a hell of a wallop. The beast jumped about a foot and stood again heavily inactive.

"Are those bulls too?" asked my wife.

"They look too cowed to me," I said. "One can't eat mutton all the time," I added.

"You know; I didn't unpack," said my wife.

"That's fine," I said. I looked at my watch. "If we hustle," I said, "maybe we could get to Gibraltar by early morning. There's a boat for England at about noon to-morrow. I saw it posted up in the lobby."

I spoke to the guide.

"The last bus leaves in half an hour," he said. "It goes only to Jerez-de-la-Frontiera. But from there one could get a fast car. At a price," he said thoughtfully, "one could get a very fast car. From here to Jerez will be about six hours. Usually it takes four but the storms have washed out the roads and a detour is needed. Beyond Jerez the bus does not go. It will leave in half an hour."

"That'll suit us," I said.

My wife turned an odd sort of colour, but she walked back to the hotel as if ~~she were a girl guide on an endurance test.~~

Seated in the bus, I saw the guide standing in the doorway of a café.

He looked straight at me. But he wasn't interested any more. We had not seen the Bridge, nor the old house, nor the English painter. We had paid him his fee but we were pretty rotten travellers. We hadn't given him a chance. He was mortally hurt. His empty eyes said so. His hands hung at his sides; and from under his wide-brimmed hat he gazed incuriously upon the little crowd standing in the glow of a peaceful evening about the ancient omnibus. His shoes were white with dust.

The driver sounded his horn. The crowd yelled and gesticulated. A small boy threw a stone at the wheels; and, rattling magnificently, we turned a corner and were almost immediately in open country.

On the way down to Jerez the other passengers were most respectful. To us, personally, they were very friendly. But my top-coat filled them with respect and pleasure. It was a symbol of wealth. Each time my coat slid off the shiny seat one of them would make a dive for it, gather it tenderly into its folds, pat it and return it to safety. My coat fell off each time the bus hit a bump. There were many bumps.

Two young men were especially friendly. At the frequent stops they steered us, with grimaces and gestures of amity, to the nearest wine-bar. Here they opened a path for us to the wine counter and, seeing we had little Spanish, ordered what wine they thought we would like. Too often, far too often, they refused the price.

They were very friendly young men. They were going, I understood, to Cadiz, there to be waiters.

But as evening drew down my wife became tired of their company and their polite, incomprehensible chatter.

The road wasn't any too good and we bounced about a great deal, which made conversation between us too difficult.

At the next halt we adventured for ourselves. To be abusive one must have silence.

I had the greatest difficulty in explaining to the young men that we wished to be alone.

"What shall I order?" I said.

"White wine: I suppose," said my wife, "it all tastes the same to me, anyway."

"Vino Blanco," I said to the squint-eyed girl.

"Dos," I said.

The girl slapped a couple of brimmed glasses onto the slop-soaked counter and I lifted them across carefully.

"This doesn't taste so good," said I.

"Filthy," said my wife, looking at me.

I looked away and caught sight of the young men. They were staring at us. Their eyes were sad and full of enquiry.

"It's pretty beastly," I said.

"Unspeakable," said my wife looking at me.

Then, out of the crowd around the bar, one of the young men pushed his way towards us.

He bent down to my glass, looked at it earnestly and smelled it.

He straightened himself and called across to the waitress. A brisk conversation blazed up between them. A bottle and two glasses were passed across from hand to hand.

"White wine," said the young man tapping the new bottle. He poured the contents of our glasses into a tub

containing a withered shrub and pushed them to one side.

Smiling triumphantly he served us the new wine.

"No good," he said, pointing to the soiled glasses. He called out again and another bottle appeared out of the mob. He turned it round and shewed us the label. He smiled happily as I nodded my head and withdrew himself, walking like a Prince.

"What is it?" asked my wife.

"Fernet-Branca," I said. "Bitters."

"That's the way it would be," said my wife, "now. One wants white wine and it comes out Bitters. Pretending you loved me," said my wife.

I didn't say anything. The flies moaned about the stuffy little café and outside our bus suddenly hooted with astonishing strength.

"They smell," said my wife.

"They're very friendly," I said.

"Oh, don't start it over again," she said.

"Well, you said they smelled."

Inside the bus everyone was drawing together against the imponderable dangers of the coming night. The lamps were lit and the voices of the passengers crackled merrily above the complaining of the coach work.

But there was one passenger who never spoke. Upright, handsome and unsmiling he sat hour after hour, immovable. The other passengers ran swift, expressionless eyes over his uniform. Behind his back they winked at each other furtively. He was a Civil Guard. He had a black, shiny helmet, broad-brimmed in front, but turned up flat against his head at the back as though he had slept in it all night.

He was one of the most handsome men I had ever

seen. He looked responsible. He sat there as though alone in the bus and stared over our heads. He was protected from the contamination of our thoughts. Yet, amazingly, just as the last of the daylight was being sucked back into the sky he made a movement of a swiftness extreme and lithe.

We were running through a grove of cork trees. Night was coming down heavily upon the trees and they were all contorted with the strain. Amongst the twisted trunks, and standing close to a wire-fence, stood two bulls. Stark and black they were against the after-glow. And silver threads dangling from their nostrils swayed in a small breeze.

"Toros bravos!" called out someone. "Toros bravos! Fighting Bulls!"

Abruptly the Civil Guard turned. He thrust his hand out of the window and stabbed upwards with two thick fingers, jabbing hard into the womb of the night.

"Ahh!" he cried in a great voice. "Ahh! Ahh!"

Then he turned himself about and sat motionless. Nor did I see him stir again till at a lonely corner the bus stopped and he stepped down into a darkness unburdened by any sign of human life.

At Jerez we all left the warm sanctuary of the bus and adventured in the brilliantly illuminated streets. There appeared to be some sort of celebration. The pavements were black with people who overflowed onto the carriage-way.

The young men insisted on carrying our heavy rucksacks and parcels to a good hotel. They would not have a drink. Politely they raised their caps, flashed a smile at us and went off very quickly. They carried themselves

proudly, their bodies working smoothly under their cheap, ill-fitting clothes.

"That's a nice pair of boys," I said looking after them.

"All Spaniards are unfaithful," said my wife.

At Jerez we ate one of the worst meals I have ever tasted. Afterwards, the waiter refused a tip though he directed me with extreme courtesy to a garage.

When I got back from arranging for our journey to Gibraltar my wife was ready. She was staring into a corner of the restaurant and did not at once look up when I came to our table.

"He says it will take a very long time," I said.

"Shall we be there before the boat sails?"

"Oh yes. He says we shall be there about seven in the morning, maybe earlier. It depends on if he can buy petrol on the way."

My wife stooped and swung her ruck-sack onto her shoulder.

At the door she stopped and looked back into the dining-room.

"Our last meal in Spain," she said.

I nodded. "Probably our last meal together," I said.

"It is better that you should go," she said. "Feeling as you do. It is better you should go. And I'd like you to go quickly."

"That's right," I said. "Quickly and gracefully. But it's you who are going."

"The same thing," she said.

Of the run down to Gibraltar I remember little. I remember the sudden roar of our exhaust through the street of a dead village. And once I woke to hear the squall of brakes as we skidded round a horse, or a mule, which had been sleeping in the middle of the road. I

I shall not easily forget, either, the sight of the primrose lawn upon the Mediterranean, as we saw it from the top of a mountain while yet we were miles inland from the sea. But there seems to be nothing else left of all those hours.

I think my wife talked a lot at intervals during the night. I seem to have a recollection of her beautifully modulated voice saying the same thing over and over again; but that may have been myself talking in my brain.

Towards dawn, I know, it grew very cold. And for a long time my wife slept with her head upon my shoulder and her mouth wide open.

The chauffeur had been about right over the time.

The sun was up as we entered British territory and there was a wide feeling in the air.

The English sentries at the frontier were very smart and self-consciously un-self-conscious. Here since our chauffeur had no pass-port we paid him off and took a taxi-cab to an hotel. He went off smiling and as un-fatigued as if he had done an ordinary one shilling stage. I saw my wife looking after him, while she unconsciously patted at her hair.

The hills over towards Tarifa were lovely in the morning light, all rose and gold. The air was filled with a scent of mimosa or some flowering shrub.

It was a happy day.

I was easily able to arrange for a single passage to England whilst my wife bathed and ate some breakfast on a verandah looking towards Algeciras.

For myself, I wasn't very hungry. But I turned into a café down by the Port and ordered a coffee-cognac.

I began to make plans. I began to feel easy within myself and to find an unexpected peace.

The narrow street commenced to fill with early shop-pers. There were women carrying baskets blazing with all kinds of flowers. They appeared utterly unconcerned at the value of their freight.

The coffee warmed my belly and I stared about me.

Soldiers stepped to and fro in front of Government House; brown-faced boys raced around on bicycles; life was grand.

I would go back, I told myself, and see some of those places we had not had time to visit.

I mused on Granada and Seville; and saw great, black bulls standing belly deep in emerald grasses.

It would be fine, I thought, soaking in my dreams. I extended my ideas. . . . There might be two of us, I thought, to stand and watch the slow sway of large African birds across pastures wide and remote.

Under the impulse of my dreaming I paid the bill and sent off an expensive cable.

I remembered suddenly that there was yet much emotion to be witnessed.

I discovered I had been longer than I anticipated. It would be necessary to hurry back with the ticket and the bright labels.

I hurried.

But it seemed too early for the cars to be on hire; so I made shift with a little carriage drawn by a thin, shiny horse.

The road up from the Port was steep and twisted, with sharp corners. Once or twice I thought the horse was not equal to the grade.

The English are very good to horses. And on the steepest part of the hill just below the hotel I thought they looked at me with disapproval. Maybe, I thought uneasily, I ought to get out and push.

When I found my wife she was sitting, very quiet and compact, besides a table littered with the ruins of a meal.

Her ruck-sack was on the tiles at her side; and she had combined several small, untidy parcels into one reasonable kind of package. Her blue gloves lay beside her plate. I had not known she had brought any gloves.

She was staring over into Spain and lifted her eyes to me as I sat down.

"I've got everything," I said.

A waiter hurried across.

"No breakfast," I said.

"Have some breakfast, John," said my wife.

"I had it down in the Town."

"There's delicious honey," said my wife, smiling at me, mistily.

I shook my head. I was near tears. I was so pleased she was going that I could hardly bear to think of her leaving me. I was tremendously sorry for her.

I fumbled in my pocket and produced the ticket, labels and various other necessary objects of ship travel.

Then I found I had in one pocket a small bunch of tiny flowers so I laid it, silently, upon the table.

"Oh, John!" said my wife.

"I've got everything," I said. "The boat sails in just about two hours. We'd better be getting down," I said and beckoned the waiter.

I paid him and he withdrew to stand wrapt in admiration of his boots.

"John," said my wife.

"I've heard it all," I said, "and you're completely right. . . . I am."

"John. That girl. . . . When I've gone! . . . You won't. . . ."

"That's quite all right. There's just nothing for you to bother about at all. I'll fix it all up with my lawyers at home. I heard all you had to say last night and I absolutely agree. It's all over."

But I knew it would be necessary for her to say it all again. She would go off more calmly afterwards. I stared over at Algeceiras, a little town trembling and pale under the pressure of the ardent sun; and I pinched the skin of my thigh through the pocket of my trousers.

Down in the harbour a great boat boomed hoarsely.

My wife leaned a little forward so that I had to look at her. An extreme spasm of emotion seized her. Her face altered unbelievably. I would never have known her. Out of that contorted mask her eyes, moist with maternal love, possessiveness and Heaven knows what other emotions, suspected and probed me.

"We got to hurry," I said; but the marrow was draining out of me.

"John!" she said. "I can't leave you alone, John! I forgive you."

It was lovely in Spain and there was an exhilarating air of great peace over the whole country, and of an utter belief in God. That, of course, was before the Civil War.

Two Poems

BY ANDREW YOUNG

REFLECTIONS ON THE RIVER

Rose-petals fall without a touch
As though it were too much
I should be standing by,
And poplars in no wind at all
Keep swaying left and right
With the slow motion of their height ;
But where roach rise and bite the Ouse
They spread round ripples like the first
Drops of a storm about to burst,
That in the water toss the boughs
And crack the garden wall ;
And as I gaze down in the sky
I see the whole vault shake
As though the heavens were seized with an earth-
quake.

A BRIMSTONE BUTTERFLY

The autumn sun that rose at seven
Has risen again at noon,
Where the hill makes a later heaven,
And fringing with bright rainbow hair
The boughs that lace the sky
Has wakened half a year too soon
This brimstone butterfly,
That fluttering every way at once
Searches in vain the moss and stones.—
Itself the only primrose there.

A WINDY HILL NEAR RYE: *Wood-engraving by Beryl Edwards*



Everything in the Window

BY I. A. R. WYLIE

THE room was familiar but not friendly. It had never belonged to anyone. It was just an enigmatic, cynical spectator. She didn't think of it that way, not knowing the words. But that was what she felt about it. The greasy little collection of cosmetics on the dressing-table, and the rubber plant sticking out like a ham actor taking his dubious bow between the plush curtains, were all that really belonged to her. And sometimes she had her doubts about the lipstick and the powders. Maybe they'd always been there and always would be there—part of the room like the bedstead with its sneering brass-faced knobs. But the rubber plant was her own idea. It was homelike. Gentlemen liked a touch of home.

Otherwise she wasn't sure of anything. She wasn't at all sure of herself. She felt vague and foggy. If anybody had come into the room and walked clean through her she wouldn't have been surprised. Going-going-gone. Maybe to-morrow she'd be gone altogether. "What the hell do you think I run this joint for?" Mrs. Jessop had asked. "Love?" Which was rather a joke when you came to think of it. "Sure," Miss Courtney had said. ("Courtney" had a fine sound. It would have looked well on Broadway if it had ever got there.) "Sure—" Oddly enough it was her pet word. When a gentleman sidled up alongside murmuring, "Looking for a friend, sweetheart?" she gave him the once-over and said,

"Sure," if he was the right sort and good for a square meal and a bit over. They weren't good for much else these days.

She saw herself in the big mirror over the fireplace. It was a dirty grey mirror full to the brim of other staring aghast faces. "Jesus!" Miss Courtney muttered and snapped off the light. The plush-curtains and the brass-bed vanished instantly. But she remained. You couldn't get rid of yourself just by snapping out a light. Her very stomach felt old and seamed and frightened. Her knees shook under her. She thought of a ham-sandwich and the counter of the corner drug-store. Ten years ago it wouldn't have occurred to her except as a joke. Those were the days. The soda-fountain clerk would as soon loan her the price of a ham-sandwich as give her the gold wrist-watch he was so pleased about. "If you're dead broke," one of her friends had said once, "there's just one thing you've got to have and that's money." She hadn't had the dimmest idea what he'd meant. She knew now. Sure. You damn well had to have money. The price of a ham-sandwich—

She couldn't go on standing there for ever. Against the strip of street light between the curtains the rubber plant took on an alarming shape. It seemed to be making obscene gestures at her. She opened the door a crack. Now there was a strip of light falling across her face. She wanted to shut the door again and stay quiet and hidden in the dark room. What did you do when you hadn't got a room? Did you sit down on the sidewalk and wait to be cleaned up with the garbage?

"Aw, snap out of it. Pull your socks up, sweetheart!"

The hall outside smelt furtive. She had three flights to go. On each flight were two doors facing each other.

She had never seen them open. If real people lived behind them they waited till the coast was clear. The last flight had a strip of worn red carpet. But Mrs. Jessop could hear a cat walking. She could tell by the way you walked how much rent you owed. She'd pounce out. "What d'you think I'm running, Miss Courtney—an orphanage?" But she made the Miss Courtney sound like a real name. And so it was. She'd chosen it out of an English novel years ago—that time she'd been given a three line part in vaudeville and was going to storm Broadway—because it suited her. She felt like it.

Mrs. Jessop understood that sort of thing. She'd been a comedienne of the old school—the frilled-drawers and custard-pie school. A real star in her day. She'd put her savings in a rooming house which was to have been a home for ladies and gentlemen of the Profession. But the depression had knocked the bottom out of things. Road companies gave Omanville the pass. If you dug among the grimy creases of Ma Jessop's face you'd find she was scared stiff like everyone else——

Not having had a square meal for a week made her clumsy. The front-door behaved like a toothless old watchdog, growling and rattling its chains. It was like a nightmare trying to get out of that damn house. She could hear Ma Jessop stirring—— But she beat her to it. She was down the brownstone steps and running as though she'd stolen something. Nearly ran down the cop at the intersection. He stared hard at her, twirling his night-stick and she steadied up and walked firmly as though she were really going somewhere. But she knew he didn't believe it either. "I'm licked," she thought. "I'm licked." She'd always been choosey. Had had

her standards. But she'd seen her face and she didn't kid herself. She'd have to pick something out of the ash-can. She didn't care. She had to have the price of a ham-sandwich and the room-rent—— Aw, what the hell——! They were all alike really. And anyway, if you're licked you're licked——

James P. Regget asked for the best room and a bath. He inferred that the best room would be pretty bad. The reception-clerk switched the guest-book round to him and tossed the key to the bell-hop. James P. Regget wrote out his name and home town, and the clerk glanced at it and didn't even look up. James P. Regget meant nothing to him. It made James P. Regget madder than ever with the fog and the railroad company that had made him miss his Chicago connection. Even at the Blackstone they knew about him. They said, "Glad to see you again, Mr. Regget," In his home town the best hotel fell over itself when he shouldered his way through the swing doors. They'd better. He owned most of the stock.

The reception clerk treated him like a stray drummer. It was a joke. But it made him mad too. He'd liked to have fired that sleek pen-pusher. He asked him, "Is there anywhere one can eat?" as though it wasn't likely, and the reception clerk jerked his head to the bell-hop, who goggled and said, "The grill-room's downstairs." Without even a 'sir' to him.

There wasn't a soul in the grill-room. Nobody except a frowsy waiter and James P. Regget. The room was decorated with gilt-framed mirrors. Everywhere he looked he saw a heavy-built, square headed man with glasses set sharply on a thick, aggressive nose. He was

somebody. Anybody could have seen that. But there wasn't anybody. Only the frowsy waiter hovering disconsolately at his elbow. He didn't know about James P. Regget's tastes and he didn't care. He wanted to go home and soak his sore feet in hot water. James P. Regget ordered clam broth and a steak and a cheese soufflé. That would keep the old fool running for a bit. James P. Regget knew by the way he was standing that his feet were sore. You didn't employ a thousand men in the Regget Smart-Shoe factory without knowing something about feet—

Gosh, if there was only someone to talk to. He needed someone. He was swelling with talk. Yesterday had been the big day in his life. For twenty-five years he'd been on Peter's Everet's track. (It took a big man to have all that patience—a sort of Napoleon.) Yesterday he'd pounced—brought him down—smashed him. Quite cool and impersonal he'd been. "Too bad, Everet." Even patted him on the back. He hadn't shown a sign. But now he wanted someone to tell about it. When he got home there'd be a dozen men who'd listen. "Smart work, J.P."—"Say, Mr. Regget—better keep on the safe side of you!" They'd better all right. There were precious few of them whose mortgages didn't lie cosily in the Regget safe-deposit box.

And Anne. The big man in the mirror smiled comfortably. He could just see her face when he told her, "Poor old Everet's made a mess of things. He's filing his petition." She'd know what he meant all right. She'd go all pinched and white and small. He'd want to hit her—

Clam broth. The T-bone steak. Cheese soufflé. He masticated deliberately. At the last moment he ordered

coffee. He sat back, his cigar between his teeth. His squared fists lay on the table. The big men in the mirror had swollen. Their thrust-out lips had a soft thickness. The skin of their faces shone faintly. He stood up and obediently they stood up with him. He left a dime on the plate. If you were James P. Regget you didn't have to fling money about. He saw the old fool staring down at the plate. He felt a whole lot better.

It was too early to go to bed. He was restless and vaguely resentful. He'd tried to start talk with a stray young man reading a newspaper in the lobby. He wanted to explain how he'd missed his connection and landed in this dump. He'd asked for a match and the young man had handed out a packet with a nod, not even looking at him.

The officer at the street corner twirled his night-stick. "There's a movie on Maine Street," he said. "It's open till eleven." He stared at James P. Regget as though he wasn't up to much good.

James P. Regget reached Maine Street. It was regular Maine Street. He glowered discontentedly at its spurious, dying liveliness. In another hour it would be dead. There was a woman standing on the curb. He glanced at her casually and then intently. Well—sure enough, there she was. The Town's Bad Girl. He knew her on sight. And business bad too. He knew the signs. Fortyish. On the skids. Make-up all anyhow. High-heeled shoes keeling over. In daylight she'd be a hag. Scared stiff, too. Scared he wouldn't take notice. Pretended she didn't know he was there. But she knew all right. She just looked up and down the street and

pretended to wait for the lights. But the lights changed and she didn't move. She couldn't move, she was so scared. It amused him like hell to keep her teetering there on the sidewalk. Suddenly he felt at ease again—smoothed out and full and satisfied. After a bit he sauntered up alongside—

“Looking for a friend ?”

She didn't even glance at him. She gasped like a child on the point of crying out loud.

“Sure,” she said.

He took her by the arm. He flexed his powerful fingers on her arm, feeling it over, feeling her tremble, getting to know her.

“Hungry ?”

“Sure—I could eat a horse.”

“Let's go find one.”

“There's Tony's down the block——”

“Nothing doing. When I take a lady out a delicatessen isn't good enough.”

“Aw, who cares ?”

She did. She was ready to drop. Another minute and she'd have sat down with her feet in the gutter. Now he was holding her up. He was big and strong. She hadn't even seen his face. But it didn't matter. If he was big and strong maybe he'd take care of her for a bit. She was small and humble. She'd like to put her face against his coat sleeve and just snivel. She belonged to him if he wanted her. He knew it too. The way he held her arm—like a police-cop. All right. If he wanted to walk her round and round looking for a swell eating joint that wasn't there she'd have to go along. He could do what he liked with her. Just for the price of a ham-

sandwich—she wouldn't say a word about the room—he could do what he liked—

He was talking about something—she didn't know what. Something about a connection. "Ain't that swell!" she said. She heard him laugh. Maybe she hadn't said the right thing. She had a job keeping her feet. They kept on going. And they came back to the delicatessen.

"Looks like there isn't any choice," he said.

He sat opposite her across the marble-topped table and she tried to see what he looked like. But there was something wrong with her. She couldn't see anything properly. His face seemed to hang suspended in a yellow fog, like a big white balloon that expanded and contracted. She couldn't see his eyes at all. They were completely hidden behind huge shining glasses. But she supposed they were looking her over. She knew that look. All right. Go ahead, Big Boy. Only for God's sake, let's eat.

He wasn't in a hurry. He ran a thick contemptuous finger down the menu.

"See here—we don't want to eat a lot. Just a snack. What about blue-points—"

"We don't stock no oysters—"

"You don't have to. But you can get them—"

"Maybe. You'll have to wait a bit—"

"We can wait. Got all the time in the world. Let's have a little drink first. Ever heard of champagne in this burg?"

He was being jovial. The big white balloon swayed a little nearer. "I like to get what I want when I want it," he said.

"Sure—"

"Sometimes I've had to wait a bit. But I get it in the end."

"You're a great guy."

"You bet. But no one knows it in this hick-town. I missed my connection or I wouldn't be here. There wasn't a soul to say 'hullo' to. If I hadn't run into a nice little girl like you——"

Well, he could call her a nice little girl if he wanted to. He could call her anything he liked. Maybe he was being funny. Maybe he was trying to be nice. She knew what she felt like. Like a wet rag. When she'd had something to eat she'd be able to play ball. What made him send out for blue points when she wanted a ham sandwich? There was a fat brown Virginia ham under a glass case. She'd seen it as she came in. He'd only to say the word. But he didn't. He'd ordered blue-points. She was too licked even to make a peep. Somebody was pouring something into a glass—sweetish biting stuff that went straight to the pit of her empty stomach. "Oh God, don't let me be sick!" she prayed reverently.

"I learnt about money when I was a kid——" he said.

She put her elbows on the table and braced her face between her hands. It stopped her from flopping all over the table. It hid the mess she'd made of her face and made her look intent and absorbed in him. He was going to tell her the story of his life. They all did. And then when he'd got round to the wife and kiddies he'd lean over, all soft and blear-eyed and pat her hand. "What about taking a look at that little nest of yours, sweetheart?" All right. He'd be good for the rent anyway. And maybe a bit to carry on with. Anyway she couldn't stop him. She was through and he knew

it. She could see his eyes now—sharp and aware behind their glasses.

“—I was the poorest kid in the school. And this other chap had a swell home— His folks used to give kid parties. But they never asked me. I hadn’t got the right clothes and my folks kept a shoe-shining parlour. But the other kids used to tell me about that house. Well—it’s mine now. I just waited round till I got it. And my kid went to that school like he did—”

“I bet he’s a swell kid.”

“He’ll be all right when I’ve finished with him. He’s got fancy notions like his mother. Wanted to be an artist. Well—I didn’t sweat like a horse to keep him for the rest of his life— He’s in the business now. And he’ll stay there if he knows what’s good for him—”

“You get your way all right, Big Shot—”

“Sure. I’ve got the money—”

He’d got the money. If you had money you could buy anything. But if you hadn’t you couldn’t even get a ham sandwich. Christ, why did she have to think all the time of ham sandwiches? She didn’t like them really. Maybe it was a sick fancy—

“Drink it up,” he said. “It won’t bite you—”

He sat back, twirling the stem of his glass between his fingers, and watching her. She was starved—on her last legs. Another year or two and she’d be in the river. Now she was like a little old circus dog, scared stiff, trying to jump through hoops. It amused him. It made up for that damned reception-clerk and the cop’s insolence to have her sitting there, waiting to eat out of his hand. He’d felt lost without someone who belonged to him. She didn’t even know his name but if he told her to crawl round the table on all fours she’d do it. She’d

do anything. The champagne was stirring his sluggish repletionness to a slow dark passion——

“What’s your name, sweetheart?”

“Mildred—Mildred Courtney——”

“Sounds swell——” The moon-face swam back into her vision. She saw that he was grinning. Something turned over inside her. Sure it was her name. And even if it wasn’t what the hell had it to do with him? “I’m King George,” he said. “Just King to you, Miss Courtney.”

She laughed. You had to laugh at their jokes. Sometimes it was the worst of the whole business. Laughing Now he was pouring some more of that stuff into her glass. “I guess King George hasn’t anything on me,” he said. “Does what he’s told. People do what I tell ‘em. They damn well have to. I’ve got a thousand men on my pay-roll. I pay ‘em and they toe the line——”
“I’ll bet they do——”

“Money talks plenty. If you’d come here asking for blue-points that greasy wop would have told you to go chase yourself. But what I want I get——”

He’d said that before. Dozens of times. She’d believed him the first time. She could see a thousand men, lying side by side like the oysters on her plate—grey, uniform, faceless, speechless, waiting for him to prong them out with his fork. Maybe she was drunk to have a silly fancy like that——

“Sometimes I’ve had to wait—like I’ve had to wait here. Yesterday for instance. I’d been waiting for yesterday twenty-five years——”

“What about yesterday, King?”

“Just a little private affair. There was a chap I used to know in the home-town. He was sweet on my wife

—before I married her—one of those namby-pamby boys women fall for. She was sweet on him too. Maybe she'd have fallen altogether. But he wasn't making much and I'd gone right ahead. Her people didn't have anything and she knew where the butter was, like everyone else. So he just quit and started business up in Bismarck. Did nicely till the smash came. Used to send her flowers on her birthday. Not so much as a card. But I knew—just by the way she looked—"He stopped, his fists squared on the table. "Well, he won't be sending her any more, I guess. Yesterday, I bought him up, lock, stock and barrel."

She supposed she'd eaten the oysters. They'd gone anyway. They hadn't done her much good. She felt hazy and frightfully worried about something. She didn't know what. Something was happening to her that she didn't understand. Oh, to hell with it ! He'd get sore if she didn't listen properly.

"You're pretty smart, King."

"I know my way round. You should have seen his face—"

She thought she could. It was queer how clearly she could see it—much clearer than the face opposite. A delicate, kind face—the sort of face some women liked—She'd have liked it herself—now at this moment. She was so tired. It would be a listening face and you could tell the truth that you were hungry and going to be flung out on the streets and licked generally. And now she could see the other woman too— She was small and easily frightened. Most of the time she'd been frightened. But on her birthday she'd felt like a real queen—

"—everything that's in the shop-window," he was saying, "just so long as you've got the price."

She nodded earnestly.

"Everything in the window——"

Well, maybe she was drunk. Drunk as a lord. Something anyway. He was paying the check. Blue points and champagne. A lot of good that had been. She'd wanted a ham sandwich and he'd known it. He'd ordered blue points because he'd known. It had been a joke, filling her up with stuff she didn't want. He was grinning like he'd do when a thousand men toed the line—like he'd do when that other woman's birthday came round and nothing with it that mattered to her.

"Well, sweetheart, what about seeing you home?"

She stood up. To her amazement she found that she was immensely tall. She towered over him. She stood on the very crest of the world.

"I'll see you in hell first," she said quietly and clearly. She saw his face—distinctly for the first time. And on her last day, whenever it came, in the gutter maybe—she'd feel good remembering it—aghast, flabby, all smashed up and gaping—"You great fat slob," she said.

.

The cop at the corner of her street stared at her. He stopped twirling his stick to stare at her.

"Say, come into a million dollars, sister?"

She tossed invisible plumes at him.

"Sure," she said.

The Christ Child

BY FRED URQUHART

I

DOES the artist dispassionately paint what his eyes see ? Or does his subconscious knowledge of the person he is painting influence his brush ?

That was the question that confronted Fergusson when he came to Galloway, to the village of Coldryan, and started to paint his picture of The Christ Child. During the whole of his forty-three years, psychological musings had had no place in Fergusson's life: not since his adolescence, anyway: certainly never in connection with his art. He had early made up his mind that he was going to be an artist: had attended Art College: had sold his pictures—stolid unimaginative canvases that did not attempt to show people anything that they did not understand and which eventually got him elected to the Royal Academy. He was a successful man and he had a reputation for turning out good workmanlike stuff. But when he came on holiday to the quiet little village on the shores of Loch Ryan something happened to him. He became conscious of Evil.

On his third day in Coldryan as he came out of the village's only shop he saw Pat O'Connell playing in the gutter.

Fergusson stood and stared. Pat was the most beautiful child he had ever seen. He was like a Botticelli angel, except that he was exceedingly dirty. For a moment Fergusson wondered how a child so young

could possibly get into such a state. Then every thought was swept ruthlessly aside as his eyes took in the perfect features, the small classic nose, the firm, rather full lips and the child's hair of that bluish-black tinge so celebrated by poets—a bunch of very dusty grapes !

At once Fergusson saw him as the Infant Christ. Fergusson was not a religious man, but he thought there was nothing more beautiful than the life of the carpenter who preached universal Communism and fell foul of Imperial Rome. Divinity, Fergusson would not grant him. But he admired his teaching. He admired him enough to want to paint a picture extolling his childhood. Too many portraits of the Christ, he felt, were devoted to the fat cherub in his mother's arms or to the man of sorrows, the crown of thorns and the pale bearded face. The man must have been once a child, a gay laughing child. That was the mood Fergusson wanted to capture: the innocence of youth, unacquainted with grief. The idea had been germinating in his brain for a long time, but it had been unable to flower for lack of a model.

While Fergusson was watching the child a voice from a doorway a few yards down the street cried: "Pat ! Whit are ye doin', ye dirty boay ? Come in at once !"

"Aw, go to hell !" the child lisped, without looking up from the mud plaster he was squeezing with his hands.

A virago in a gaudily printed overall descended upon him and lifted him away from his occupation. Fergusson had a confused vision of red roses intertwined with sprays of honeysuckle, lusty red arms and a shock of matted black hair like the child's own.

"Excuse me," he said, stepping forward. "Is this your child?"

A pair of wild dark eyes glared like a cornered animal's above the child's dark head. She held the child firmly against her body, unheedful of his threshing legs and loud yells.

"Sure he's mine," she said. "Whit of it?"

"I am an artist," Fergusson said. "I'd like to paint your child."

She stared at him. "Paint Pat? An' for why would ye want to paint Pat?"

Fergusson smiled as he spread out his hands and shrugged. "I don't know. Can one properly explain these urges? He's a beautiful child. I feel that I won't be content till I get him on to canvas. You *will* let me paint him, won't you?"

"I'll think about it," she said.

He smiled at her suspicious look. "I'll pay you for the privilege."

"I'll see," she said. "I've met artists before."

And she carried the screaming child into the house. Fergusson smiled and began to walk slowly up the street to his lodgings. He was fully aware that he was an object of interest to the villagers, many of whom came to their doors to stare at him. But he took no notice of them. He was thinking about the woman and the child. Especially the child.

He asked his landlady about them.

Miss M'Haffy sniffed and folded her arms across her flat bosom. "That would be Nora O'Connell," she said dryly. "A terrible bad lot she is an' all. You watch yersel' wi' her, Mr. Fergusson."

"She dislikes artists," he said, smiling slyly.

"By my soul, aye, an' she should! Whit wi' her ha'in' three weans an' the fathers a' bein' artists an' her

no' married to ony o' them ! She was a servant in a boarding-house in Glasgow," Miss M'Haffy said. "There were some artists there. Regular toffs they were too. An' Nora let them ha'e their way wi' her."

"She does not appear particularly attractive," Fergusson said.

"No, but then ye never ken whit some men'll do when their coarser feelin's are aroused," said Miss M'Haffy, who would never know. "And artists—if ye'll excuse me sayin' so, Mr. Fergusson—are queer cattle."

"I daresay !" Fergusson laughed. "The child's very beautiful," he said.

"Beauty's only skin deep. Pat's a wild imperent boay. There's no' a wilder wean in the village."

"Indeed ?"

"The things that boay does ! An' the stories he tells !" Miss M'Haffy shook her head sadly. "I sometimes think he must ha'e lived afore. He's like an ould man. There's a wheen ould men in Coldryan whae can tell grand stories, but there's no' mony o' them can beat Pat. He'll come to a bad end yet, by my soul an' he will ! He often comes an' plays wi' the weans next door. He's been wantin' to get in here for a while, but I've aye discouraged him. I'm fond enough o' weans, but I cannie thole them when they begin to traipse around, upsettin' ornaments an' puttin' their dirty feet on the chairs."

"Children are all right in their place," Fergusson said. "Their own place !"

Miss M'Haffy flushed and laughed roguishly at his joke. "The other day Pat cam' to the door," she said. "He asked if he could get in to see the pussy. 'Indeed no,' I says, 'you cannie get in to see the pussy. The pussy's asleep.' But he didnie go away. No' him !

He looked at me wi' they bould black eyes o' his. 'Well then,' he says, 'can I get in to see your furniture ?'"

II

A week later after he had persistently bombarded Nora O'Connell for her consent she brought the child to Fergusson's lodgings. It was the first time Fergusson had seen Pat with a clean face, and he thought he had never seen anything so beautiful.

"An' whit do ye want Pat to do ?" Nora said.

"I want you to take off his clothes and let him stand over there," Fergusson said.

"Off his clothes! Do ye mean ye want him to be naked?"

"Certainly," Fergusson said.

"Oh, no," Nora said.

She was obdurate. She would let Pat pose for him but she would not let him be portrayed in the nude. Fergusson tried to reason with her, but it was useless. He offered more money. But, no, she would not have it ! He was not going to paint her child with nothing on ! "Sure an' whit would folk think ?" she said. "An' whit would Pat think himsel' when he was a grown man an' he saw folk lookin' at his picture an' him wi' no' even a clout around him ?"

"All right," Fergusson said.

He rummaged in his trunk and brought out a piece of lovely old brocade. "Take off his clothes and wrap that around him," he said. He made up his mind that he could easily paint the child nude. He wouldn't allow Nora to see the portrait before it was finished. It would be too late then for her to do anything.

The child submitted to having his clothes taken off and to having the brocade swathed around him. He fingered

it shyly. "Nice," he said. And he made no protest when Fergusson made him stand before the window and hold out his arms in the sign of the cross.

Fergusson's idea was to show the Infant Christ, his body gleaming with purity, holding out his arms as if to embrace the world, his shadow forming a dark cross that loomed menacingly behind him. He began to make a preliminary sketch but before long he abandoned it and made Pat change his position. All the time Nora sat placidly with her hands loose in her lap and stared vacantly at the carpet. She evinced no desire to see what Fergusson was drawing. Fergusson was careful not to tire Pat. He halted frequently and while the child was eating fruit and sweets and looking at picture-books he tried to engage Nora in conversation. But this he found almost as difficult as getting the correct position for the picture. Nora had no small-talk. Books, theatres, music, the weather: *I drew a blank, my lord*: not even the almost universal interest of her kind: the cinema. Fergusson was puzzled, wondering what the artists in the Glasgow boarding-house had seen in her. He did not even think she was beautiful. Beauty of a kind she must once have had, but even it must have been a shallow empty prettiness. There was nothing to suggest that men of intellect had once found her attractive. But Pat had beauty. It was only in relation to Pat that Fergusson found Nora beautiful. He was puzzled and irritated. He did not want the woman to chatter. But he was distracted by her bovine silence as much as he had been distracted by the vivacious inanities of the mothers of many of the children he had painted.

He made a number of sketches and got Pat to change his pose frequently, but when the sitting ended he hadn't

made one sketch that pleased him. He had not foreseen this. He had realised, of course, that it would be difficult to do full justice to such beauty as Pat's: it was so breath-taking, so unearthly and so ethereal. But he had not anticipated that he would be so slow in starting the picture; he was so eager to get it on to canvas. It was as if something held him back, staying his hand. He seldom progressed so slowly at the beginning of a picture. At the end progress was usually slow when he was endeavouring to get every detail to correspond with his conception. But at the beginning he invariably got on quickly. This was an exceptional case.

But it was an exceptional picture, he told himself in excuse. It would be his masterpiece. Begin slowly. Continue slowly. And then, like a fire that has at last caught hold, finish with a great burst of energy. Rather like the religion introduced by the subject.

At the end of the sitting Fergusson said: "Now, we'll have tea." He knew by the sniff lurking at the corners of Miss M'Haffy's nostrils that she was displeased and to propitiate her he asked her to join them.

"An' how did the picture go?" Miss M'Haffy said when they were seated at the table.

"Not very well," Fergusson said.

Miss M'Haffy sniffed as if to say she had guessed as much. "Did Pat no' behave himsel'?" she said.

"Pat was splendid," Fergusson said. "He stood remarkably well for a child. I'm to blame. I can't have been in the proper mood."

III

Although Fergusson blamed himself for the failure of the first day's sitting he blamed Pat for the failure of

the second day's. The second day Pat was in a modest mood, but Fergusson, being a bachelor and knowing children only as models, did not understand this. He put it down to foolishness and he did not blame Pat as much as he blamed Nora.

It started when Pat objected to Nora's taking off his clothes before the artist. "He'll see me ! He'll see me !" Pat cried. And he ran behind a chair when Nora attempted to take off his trousers. He looked around the chair and grinned. Fergusson was astonished at the puckishness of that grin.

"Come on, Pat. Be a good boy," Fergusson said.

"No, you'll see me," Pat said.

"Nonsense !" Fergusson said. "I'm not looking at you."

"But you are. Isn't he, Nora ?"

"Don't be silly," she said.

But she made no move to make the child obey her. She sat quietly and waited until Pat should be ready. Fergusson could have struck her. The cow ! Sitting there and letting that imp make a fool of her !

At last he said savagely : "I'll go outside."

He walked angrily up and down the garden path until Nora called that Pat was ready. He found the child standing serenely in the place and in almost the position he had stood in the day before. But all eagerness to create had gone from Fergusson. He willed himself to place the child in the correct position, then he started to work. Pat looked extremely angelic. Fergusson wondered if he had imagined he'd seen that puckish look. The child's face was calm and lovely. But although he wanted to forget it the impish grin subtly imposed itself before Fergusson's eyes, veiling the child's

face. He stopped work, hoping to forget it in conversation with Nora. But her stupidity appeared even greater than it had done the previous day, since Fergusson had exhausted all possible topics of conversation. And when he started work again and still could not see what he wanted to see he flung down his pencil and cried: "No more to-day."

He did not invite them to stay to tea. He did not even trouble to see them out of the house, but while Nora was dressing Pat he flung on his waterproof and went out. He tramped down the village street and turned into a lane that led to the Scaur.

The Scaur was a narrow neck of sand and shingle that stretched for several hundred yards into Loch Ryan, curving like a crack on the leaden mirror of the water. To the right, towards the town of Stranraer, the countryside was bare and uninviting: pale green and grey: fields and stone-dykes and an occasional gorse-bush. But to the left it looked more inviting. That part of the countryside lay on a private estate, however. The boundaries were strongly barbed-wired.

Fergusson tramped down the Scaur, kicking the pebbles with his heavy brogues. The high wind wailed around him, singing in his ears, beating on his forehead until there was a dull pain between his eyes and all thought had gone from him. He stood for a time at the end of the Scaur and stared at the water, the wind swishing around him, washing away all anger, all feeling. Retracing his steps he began to wonder if Pat was the right model for the Christ Child. Would it not be better to paint him as Pan or as a faun? Was there not just that suggestion of devilry about him more in keeping with these subjects? Fergusson frowned and buried

his chin deep into the collar of his waterproof. That was nonsense. The child was as beautiful as an angel and there was not a trace of evil in him. It was the stories he had heard from Miss M'Haffy and his own perverted imagination that were trying to blackguard the child and tarnish his beauty. He was the Christ Child: lovely, beatic, something to be worshipped. Fergusson's entrails melted as he thought of the child's loveliness. And he grew sad and bitter as he realised that such loveliness was bound sooner or later to coarsen and fade and eventually die. If only he could keep it to watch over and warm himself at as he could keep a porcelain vase or a rare print. . . . But Nora would never allow him to adopt Pat. Miss M'Haffy had told him of the number of people who had wished already to adopt him and his brother and sister. He must get the loveliness on to canvas so that he would have it to console him long after Pat had grown and toughened into a human being.

An old fisherman was sitting behind a dyke when Fergusson returned to the beach. Fergusson had seen him once or twice in the village. He was sitting motionless, staring in front of him. He nodded to Fergusson and gave him the village-greeting: "Aye, boay!"

"Aye," Fergusson said.

He sat down beside him. The old man was chewing tobacco. He chewed in silence for a while, then he squirted out a mouthful of the yellowish-brown fluid. "It's nice to sit ahint a dyke an' hear the wind whistlin'," he said.

Fergusson said it was. "Are visitors not allowed to go on the estate?" he asked, nodding towards the huge rocks and wooded hills that lay to the left of the Scaur.

"By my soul, no!" the fisherman said. "The estate used to be open to the public every Sunday, but Ould

Lordie closed it when a wheen folk began to pu' the floo'ers."

"The many suffering because of the few," Fergusson said

"Aye." The fisherman spat. "Ye're the artist-man that's bidin' wi' ould Miss M'Haffy?"

"Yes," Fergusson said.

"I hear ye're paintin' a picter o' Nora O'Connell's Pat."

"Yes," Fergusson said.

"An' whit will ye be paintin' him as—if it's no' an imperent question?"

"Christ," Fergusson said.

The fisherman looked at him for a moment, thinking he was using one of the village's favourite oaths to express his resentment at being questioned. "Aye, boay, do ye tell me?" he said after a while. "Yon's a wild wean. I doot ye'll ha'e trouble wi' him." He chuckled. "Ye'll no' be thinkin' o' paintin' Nora hersel' as the Virgin Mary?"

IV

The next day the picture progressed no better. But this was not Pat's fault. He did not scruple to take off his clothes before the artist. Indeed Fergusson fancied that he gloried in disclosing his nakedness. He was in a skittish mood and he danced about in his shirt-tail, holding it like a ballet-skirt and flirting it at Fergusson and Nora.

Nora did not check him. She sat placidly and waited until he thought fit to stop capering. Fergusson busied himself with his paints and brushes, disregarding Pat's squeals of mirth and his frequent "Look ! Look !" At last he said brusquely: "Come now, Pat, that's enough of that."

Pat stopped at once and he stood patiently while Fergusson pulled off his shirt and wound the brocade

around him. And he behaved perfectly while the artist was at work. Not that Fergusson was able to do much work. Pat's exhibition had unsettled him. He told himself that he was a fool to allow such a triflē to obscure his vision, but try as he might he could not prevent the lovely graceless faun from peering mockingly from behind the calm beautiful Christ Child, tantalising him, jeering at his inability to see him as he wanted to see him. The faun, the faun—what the devil had put that idea into his head? He stopped angrily; he simply couldn't go on. He must wait until he was more composed.

"That's all to-day, Pat," he said.

"I want you to put on my clothes," Pat said.

"Sure now an' Mr. Fergusson's busy," Nora said.

"I want him to put on my clothes," Pat said.

"All right," Fergusson said.

He laughed as he tried to help the child into his garments. "This is a new occupation for me," he said. Pat did not help him much. He squirmed and giggled. Then as Fergusson was endeavouring to haul on his trousers he broke away suddenly and ran to Nora. "He touched me!" he cried. And he hid his head in Nora's lap, giggling and spluttering. "He touched me. . . . He touched me. . . ."

Fergusson felt a flush mounting his neck and creeping along his cheeks and he was annoyed at himself for flushing. Miss M'Haffy was correct: the child was a liar. To try to hide his embarrassment he said: "We'll have tea now," and he went to the door and called to Miss M'Haffy.

Pat behaved well during tea. He nibbled delicately at bread and butter; it was not until Fergusson pressed him that he reached out and took a cake from the plate. He sat in the frame of the window and the late afternoon

sunlight gilded the tips of his curls, haloing his pale pure face. Fergusson wondered again if it was his imagination that clouded his view of the child; Pat seemed so unconscious of evil.

After they had gone he discovered that there was jam smeared all over one of Miss M'Haffy's treasured satin cushions. There was too much jam for it to be accidental.

V

Eventually Fergusson began to paint Pat in his original pose, but the picture took form slowly, conforming in no way to Fergusson's conception. All the time he was beset by doubts and indecision, and sometimes he was tempted to abandon it and leave Coldryan. But he knew that if he did that he would have no peace; he would be pursued by the knowledge that he had failed and his dreams would be haunted by the figures of the Christ Child and that other imp with his taunting face. His dreams were already filled by them, and he knew that if he allowed them to defeat him he would never forget them. It was better to stay and to try to get the picture finished. It was not as if it was difficult: in theory, anyway. Here was beauty: all he had to do was paint it. He was a fool to allow his imagination to defeat him. Even although Pat was as bad as everybody said, that did not mean that he should allow these tales to obscure his physical loveliness. Whatever the child was spiritually had no effect on whatever he was physically. He must look at him dispassionately: look at him as a scientist looks at a unique specimen. Here was beauty and it was his job to drag it up from the depths as a diver brings up treasure from the bed of the ocean. It was there, so clear and so lovely, and such

loveliness must be given to the world to share with him.

But he sometimes wondered if the world would wish to share the beauty with him and if the world would thank him for the efforts he was taking to catch that loveliness.

The more he saw of Pat the more Fergusson detested him. Nora came with him only to the first few sittings: afterwards she allowed him to come by himself. At first he behaved fairly well, but growing familiar and losing his initial shyness—not that shyness, unless of a simulated variety, was a feature of his composition—Pat soon became ungovernable. He discovered that he could blackmail Fergusson into giving him sweets and pennies by threats. “Gi’ me a penny or I’ll yell” was one of his favourite expressions, and if Fergusson did not comply with his demand he would lie down on the floor and roll about. Sometimes Fergusson was tempted to let him carry out his threat, but fear of what Miss M’Haffy would think made him weakly give in. Reason told him that Miss M’Haffy would doubtless be delighted to hear Pat screaming, but weakness triumphed over reason. And something stronger than weakness, but what it was Fergusson did not know. Kindness and a desire to make a human being happy—Fergusson stigmatised it as a mixture of these feelings, but more likely it was a dislike of seeing a divinity show its feet of clay in such a blatant manner. Anyway, coddling Pat soon became as hard for Fergusson as painting the picture. And he began to hate the sight of the child and to fear his coming to the sittings. He wanted him to come, but he wanted him to come as he wanted him to be; he did not want him to come as he would come. It was all right when he thought of him as the calm, beautiful Christ Child: he could always see him as

that in his imagination. But the reality—the snivelling, whining boy with his sly looks and his eternal demands repelled him. That was why he painted better when Pat was not posing for him; although even then memories of Pat lying on the floor and kicking with temper overshadowed his ideal.

One day when the picture was nearing completion and Fergusson could not get the angelic look properly on the canvas Christ's face he sent Pat into the garden to play. The child immediately climbed the fence in order to play with the children next door. Fergusson smiled as he followed Pat into the garden. That would suit him all right. He would be able to call Pat when he needed him. And he seated himself in the shade of Miss M'Haffy's red-currant bushes to wait for inspiration to settle on him like a heavy dew. He had a book with him, but he did not read it. He listened to the sounds of the children playing. The sun was warm and it shone strongly on the pages of his book and dazzled his eyes. He closed his eyes.

He heard Pat say: "I'm a tiger and I'm going to eat you up."

"No, you're not, Pat O'Connell. I'll tell my mother."

"All right, Annie, I'm not a tiger," Pat said. "I'm an engine but you'd better watch I don't run you down. Puff-puff-puff!"

"I'll tell my mother, Pat."

"All right, Annie. I won't hurt you."

"Let's play at something else, Pat. Let's play at shops."

"No, let's play at cannibals. I'm a bloody man and I'm going to eat you up."

"I'll tell my mother, Pat O'Connell."

"All right, you can tell her, you bloody clipe. Go to her and say——"

Fergusson was on the point of jumping up and remonstrating, but he thought better of it. He thought it would do less damage if no notice was taken of the oaths; Pat would be sure to use them in defiance. Fergusson remembered his own childhood and the joys of forbidden fruit.

But Miss M'Haffy did not remember her childhood. She had overheard Pat from the upstairs window and, shoving out her head like a banner of righteousness, she called: "Is that you, Pat O'Connell? Ye wicked imperent boay! Get awa' oot o' here! I'll learn ye to say things like that."

There was a mad scamper at the other side of the bushes. Fergusson sat perfectly still. He heard Miss M'Haffy cry: "If ye come back here again, Pat O'Connell, I declare to God I'll whip the skin off yer behind." Fergusson didn't move. He tried to shrink into invisibility, but Miss M'Haffy had seen him. "Did ye no' hear that, Mr. Fergusson?" she called.

"I beg your pardon," Fergusson said. "I was asleep. Do you want me for something, Miss M'Haffy?"

VI

Nora accompanied Pat to the sitting on the following day. "Sure an' he was feared for ould Miss M'Haffy," she said. "She's frichtened the wean." But she did not ask and Fergusson did not enlighten her as to the reason. He felt in better fettle than he had done for some time past and he attacked the canvas vigorously. Perhaps because there were no rollings on the floor or demands for pennies to-day he got on well with his work. Pat

shaved angelically and when the sitting ended he said : I can draw too."

Fergusson smiled. It had taken Pat some time to discover what most of the children Fergusson had painted were positive about the first time they had visited his studio. He gave Pat a pencil and an old sketching-block and he sat down and talked to Nora while waiting tea. He was pleased to see her. He couldn't account for this at all. He had not once thought about her, yet as soon as she had appeared he had been aware of something having been lacking before. The placid owl-like attitude while he painted no longer irritated him. Her imperturbability soothed him, offsetting Pat's mercurial temperament.

"Look !" Pat cried.

He held out the sketching-block. On the topmost sheet was a crude and very rude drawing of a horse. It was quite an achievement for a child of four. Fergusson raised his eyebrows. There must be something in heredity. No doubt it was Nora's coarser fibres that supplied the rude vigour.

"Look !" Pat said, pointing. "What's that ?"

"It's very good," Fergusson said, turning away from the crudity the child was so eager to exhibit.

"Look !" Pat cried insistently. "It's a stallion."

"So I see," Fergusson said. And turning away quickly he said to Nora: "I would like very much to see the Sheringwall estate. I suppose it's very beautiful, but I understand nobody's allowed in the grounds."

"No. Ould Lordie kicked up a fuss because a wheen folk picked his floo'ers an' tramped doon his shrubs."

"So I heard," Fergusson said. Then angrily : "Oh, be quiet, Pat ! Can't you see that Nora and I are talking ?"

"I just wanted you to look at this," Pat said. "See!"

"Ould Lordie an' Lady S. are goin' awa' to London next week," Nora said. "If ye like I'll tak' ye ower the estate then."

"But will nobody be there to stop us?"

"Sure, there's a wheen keepers an' there's the shaffer an' his wife, but they all know me."

"Won't they say anything?"

"Sure an' why should they? They know *I* won't be goin' there to pu' floo'ers."

"Look!" Pat said.

"Be quiet, Pat," Fergusson said. "Or I'll box your ears for you." He looked at Nora and said: "I don't know if we should go."

"Maybe ye're feared?" Nora said.

"Of course not."

"Maybe ye don't like women?" Nora said. "I've met artists before who didn't. I declare to God they were queer fish too."

"All right," Fergusson said. "I'll come."

VII

On the afternoon that they started on their walk through the Sheringwall estate Fergusson was thinking more about his picture of Pat than he was thinking about Pat's mother. The picture was practically finished and it perfunctorily conformed to Fergusson's conception. But there was something lacking. The face worried him. He fancied that there was a mocking glimmer at the mouth, but whether this sprung from his imagination or whether his knowledge of Pat had made him unconsciously paint the gloating glimmer instead of the actual cherubic sweetness he did not know. Sometimes he

did not notice it and he would congratulate himself on having completed a masterpiece. But when he looked at the picture again he would see the evil look intensified. The sittings had stopped, but Fergusson could not say *It is finished* and begin to paint the landscapes that had originally brought him to Coldryan. He would sit for hours before the picture, his mind full of doubt and a strange fear, occasionally touching the features in the hope that he would at last get them perfect.

He was annoyed at Nora for forcing him to go for this walk. She had absolutely no attraction for him. She was a faded flower: very much faded. He congratulated himself that the day was long past when he had speculated upon the possibility of having a love-affair with every woman who showed that she was interested in him. But as they walked along he began to experience a change in his feelings towards Nora. Her company had a soothing effect on him. She said nothing and he did not feel that she expected him to say anything. He should have allowed his thoughts to drift into the philosophical channels into which they drifted so often, but he could not allow them to do that; and he was not annoyed at himself for thinking of nothing. He kept glancing at Nora. He was beginning to realise why she had proved attractive to those other artists. She had neither beauty nor intelligence: with her a man could be completely at his ease as he could not have been at ease with a woman who possessed either of these qualities. With a beautiful woman a man must endeavour to keep his senses from making a fool of him, and with an intelligent one he must try to match her intellect with his own. But with a woman like Nora he does not need to worry about what she thinks of him.

There was a restfulness about Nora, a serenity like the serenity and calm understanding of a mother nursing a sick child. For the first time since he came to Coldryan he gave himself up completely to the moment. All his worries about the picture vanished and the past and the future dissolved into nothingness. There was nothing but the blue sky latticed by the branches of the trees above and the path stretching in front of him. He was barely aware of Nora walking by his side, and he walked joyously, savouring the beauty that he saw everywhere.

A lot of money must have been spent on the Sheringwall estate. The place reminded Fergusson of some National Park or Botanic Gardens: everything was so well-planned and carefully cared-for. The climate of Galloway is very mild and this had led the owner to plant hydrangeas, fuchsias, Egyptian grasses and many other semi-tropical and exotic plants in an endeavour to make the place as foreign as possible. Fergusson had noticed from the Scaur that the shores of Lock Ryan that bordered the estate were very rocky and that the slopes above the rocks were thickly wooded. Now he discovered that these slopes were terraced into numerous narrow paths each neatly raked and bordered with rocks overgrown with rock-plants. The entire place had the effect of a rock-garden in a wood. From where he was walking with Nora, Fergusson could see the sea sparkling between the trees far beneath him. It was like gazing into a pool obscured by giant-ferns.

"And is all this beauty kept hidden?" he said suddenly. "Does nobody ever see it?"

"Just Ould Lordie and Her Ladyship," Nora said.

"Two old people who can't even stay at home to enjoy it, but must gallivant away to London! It's criminal

Beauty like this should be given to the world. All beauty should be given to the world for everybody to share it."

"Is that why ye're paintin' Pat?" Nora said.

They went down a path that led on to rocks encircling a sandy little cove. The rocks were covered by a coarse grass and by little pink flowers like clover. They sat down, and after a time Fergusson said: "I'd love to have a swim."

"Sure an' why don't ye?" Nora said.

"No bathing-costume."

"Sure an' ye don't need one," Nora said.

"I don't suppose I do," Fergusson said, and he began to take off his clothes. "Are you coming in?"

Nora shook her head. "I'll watch ye," she said.

VIII

Pat was careful to keep out of Miss M'Haffy's way after the incident in the garden, but one day she met him in the street. He had a wooden sword stuck through a belt and he was marching manfully. The Italo-Abyssinian War was raging at the time and all the village children were fighting mock-battles. Pat glared defiantly at Miss M'Haffy.

"I'm an Italian," he said belligerently.

"Are ye?" she said. "By my soul, an' I hope ye get killed."

Pat marched sullenly past until he got out of reach. Then he turned and shouted one word. The effect was as deadly as the Italian poison-gas on the defenceless Abyssinians.

Weeks passed but still Fergusson could not say that the picture was finished. One day he would be certain

that he had at last got the effect he strove after; the next morning he would see that mocking gleam in the Christ Child's eyes, as if it had grown on the canvas overnight. He wondered if it was his dreams intruding into his day-consciousness; for in his dreams the child taunted him more and more, maddening him. He made up his mind to leave Coldryan, but from day to day he postponed his departure. He could not bear the thought of never seeing Pat again; he wanted to enjoy every moment of Pat's childhood loveliness. If the picture had been a faithful likeness he would have gone at once, knowing that he would always have it to console him. But was the picture a faithful portrayal? He could not trust himself to judge it at all. He needed an outsider's opinion. But he knew that it was useless to ask Nora or Miss M'Haffy. Nora would object at once to Pat's nude state. And Miss M'Haffy, even if she was not shocked for the same reason, would be almost certain to see Pat as he himself saw him. He thought of asking one of his friends to come and give his opinion, but he decided that he would make himself look foolish if he went to such lengths.

He was in a state of conflict such as he had never experienced before. He could not read or settle his mind to anything else; always that triumphantly gloating face floated like cigarette-smoke between him and whatever he was trying to settle on; it was as irksome as a stone in his shoe; even although he didn't feel it he was aware of it all the time. He tramped the countryside for miles, hoping by an excess of physical energy to arrive at that state of exhaustion where he would find forgetfulness. His eyes grew wild and there were gaunt hollows in his cheeks. Miss M'Haffy looked aghast

and tried by cooking all kinds of delicacies to tempt him to eat.

Then one day the picture disappeared.

Fergusson returned from a long tramp, weary and footsore, but with his mind made up. He would ask Nora to marry him. That seemed to be the only solution to the difficulty. He could watch over Pat and train him to be as he wanted him to be in the picture. He could have bought a porcelain vase or a rare print, but since he could not buy a human-being, adoption by marriage seemed the only way. Wearily he closed the door of his sitting-room behind him. He knew that all his acquaintances would sneer at him for marrying an illiterate village-girl no longer in her prime; in imagination he heard them give the inevitable reason. But he did not care. He would have some of that loveliness he had been looking for all his life. He went to the easel to examine the picture. Every time he came into the room he did this, hoping always that he would see what he wanted to see and not what he feared he would see.

The easel was empty.

He called for Miss M'Haffy, telling himself that she had shifted it but knowing perfectly well that she had not. As indeed she had not. "I declare to God I never set eyes on it," she said. "I've been out all afternoon."

"Out?" Fergusson said.

He walked furiously to the O'Connells' door, but Nora told him that Pat was out. "He'll likely be down at the green wi' the other weans," she said.

"I'll go there," Fergusson said.

He was moving away when Nora said "Wait!" in a queer tone. Glancing down at the door-step she said shyly: "I ha'e somethin' to tell ye."

"It can wait," Fergusson said, guessing what it was.

He strode quickly to the piece of waste-ground at the end of the village-street. Before he reached it he knew that something out of the ordinary was happening by the shrill, excited cries of the children. At the end of the street some children he met whispered together and laughed. After he had passed one of them called out something, but Fergusson pretended he did not hear.

An apology for a tent made of old sacks and sail-cloth was standing in the middle of the green. A crowd of children and half-grown youths were clustered around it listening to the raucous roars of a red-faced lout of about seventeen. He was exhorting them not to miss the chance of a lifetime—the greatest show on earth—positively one performance only before it appeared before all the crowned heads of Europe—and all for one penny!

Fergusson pushed his way through the crowd and glared at the barker. The lout grinned cheekily at him. "Sure, an' I didnie think ye'd want to see this show, boay," he said. "One penny, please."

Fergusson roughly pushed him aside and entered the tent. It was dimly lit by an oil-lamp. There were one or two children inside, gaping and giggling.

The picture was hanging against the tent-wall opposite. For a moment the gloating smile on the Christ's face cut into Fergusson's entrails like a knife. But that agony passed when he saw Pat posturing naked beside the picture and singing a smutty song.

Before Pat could escape, Fergusson reached out and grabbed him. His hands hard-hitting on the child's soft nakedness gave him an exquisite pleasure and he conducted the music of the child's demoniac yells feverishly. The picture no longer troubled him.



ADAM AND EVE: *Wood-engraving by Gertrude Hermes*

A Chinese Vase

BY R. GIBBONS

A NOBLE mandarin became acquainted with a story that was true. So long as it was true it matters not how he gathered it. Some he may have heard in the streets of the town of Ke-Pong; some may have beaten on his ear-drums in the chants of singing-women; without doubt some wafted on opium smoke from the souls of his ancestors.

It was his fancy that it should be indited for perusal, yet was this story never read in old China.

One, a poetess, offered her services. But her hair had not been well guarded since last built, and her kimono was thrown on anyhow.

He rejected her offer in disgust. "It is deplorable that the singing bird lacks brightness of plumage," said the mandarin coldly.

Then he went to the heart of the town and found three brilliant scribes. So many days had they spread their mats in the sun and sat waiting for work, that they appeared to reside in the market place.

Of these he asked, "Which one of you will undertake to compose a story that clatters in my soul like broken pottery? And aptly so, for indeed it is about a broken pot."

Each of the scribes desired to be the one to compose it. Therefore he engaged them, all three, and installed them in the palace, supplied with new brushes, good vellum and a paint whose pigment was of powdered gold.

By word of mouth he told them the story; then desired that they would write it, beginning with the title.

One scribe sighed and wrote "Tale of a Woman." Another gave three heavy sighs and wrote "Tale of Three Women." The third, heaving a thousand sighs, was so belaboured that he grew as pale as death. Then he wrote "Tale of a Thousand Women."

"Such disagreement among scribes is not propitious," declared the mandarin. "It is fated that the story be not written.

"Burn the brushes wherewith you would have inscribed it," he said, "that their dishonourable uselessness be not perpetuated in other stories. And swallow your gilt paint, for it is well known that only inner illumination will show a man wisdom."

Such is the reason why this story was never read in old China.

There lived a maiden in Ke-Pong who was not as other maidens; for her face was not pallid as old ivory, but delicately flushed like the wild roses that grow on the English hedgerows. Her father was from England; a man of high birth.

The island of England, in olden times, has been called heaven-far by those who considered it was situated midway between Ke-Pong and the last dwelling place of the spirits of the dead; while the totally unenlightened believed it did not exist at all, and thought it was a dream.

Beside the house of the girl's parents was another, where dwelt people of the same birth who had a son. Both houses faced a patch of parched grass known as a lawn; all around the lawn were lean shrubs marshalled in single file and wildly waiting for water.

The two young people innocently believed they were sweethearts secretly. They constantly met and their courtship grew like a flame eating up parchment.

Yet all the parents were perfectly aware of the premature love affair, and gathered together to discuss it. This is a quite suitable match they decided unanimously, except for one thing only. They are far too young. So the young people were parted till time should be riper.

The girl was placed in a convent to dwell with nuns of a kindly, gentle order; a place known to the natives as the Shelter for Little Daughters. The convent nestled privately in the town of Ke-Pong like a closed box among a litter of open coloured fans.

Sometimes at night the girl found opportunity to scale the convent walls and meet her lover. Their courtship grew like the dawning sun racing over the rice-fields.

Her young lover was as ignorant of the dangers of the town as she. One night, as she was flitting to the trysting place, through the street of Floating Petals, she was terrified by the leering face of an evil-looking Chinaman.

While she hesitated in fear, not knowing whether to pass him or turn round and fly back, he caught her swiftly in his arms, placed a hand over her mouth to stifle her cry, and in a moment she was in a low, dim apartment where men lay on couches, some smoking the pipe of forgetfulness.

A silk-clad man scowled at her assailant and said, "Well, scavenger pig, what have you brought me?"

"Honey to sweeten your dreams," answered the other, turning towards him the face of the girl.

The old man in silk regarded her.

"She is a beautiful girl," he said as though in doubt.

"She is . . . a beautiful girl," responded the other.

"What do you mean?"

"She is as nothing," remarked the servant calmly. "She was abroad in the streets of the town, just now in the dead of night. I caught her like a shadow flickering among shadows.

After the girl had been crushed in the arms of one yellow man she was passed to another with due politeness. For the tasted cup can honestly be recommended.

She was tossed to a man who reclined beneath a swinging lantern. "Here is a reminder of the cradle."

"You are wrong," declared the man hastily and thrusting the girl quickly from him so that she rolled to the floor. "It is a foreboding of the coffin."

"But see, Hoo Choo," he called to the servant. By the glow of the lantern he had noticed under her pale face the dark dress of the convent. "You have stolen this bird from the wrong cage."

Several of them hovered over her for a moment. One glanced streetwards. "This petal should be set floating," said he meaningly. And so saying he himself departed by another exit. For sometimes wisdom has wings.

Before dawn the girl was found, by her distracted lover, still in the street of Floating Petals crouching beside a wall. She was like a wild rose that has been plucked and dropped in the field. She was bruised and withered; she was dying.

Once only she looked in her lover's eyes and spoke. "I have dwelt in a horrible nightmare. But I will wake to my real life again."

Far from the town of Ke-Pong an old Chinaman nursed his failing silk-farm. His wife was dead and there was none with him of his own family except a little

daughter, the last bud of his tree of life, who was called, from her gaiety among the ragged mulberry trees, Tinkling Laughter.

Working on the farm for him was a youth who yet was not of the class of hired labourer. He was the son of another silk farmer who was ruined and had died in his misery.

It was understood by all that this youth, in due course, should marry Tinkling Laughter, though no word had been given. Certainly he had never committed such a strange indiscretion as to kiss the maiden; nor even mentioned love; for he knew nothing of love. He only knew the sound of Tinkling Laughter among the ragged mulberry trees.

Year by year the loads of golden cocoons wended their way from the farm, and year by year the money returned for them grew less and less.

One day, after the golden cocoons had long gone and their money was just returned, the old man counted it many times. Then he sat with the money many hours, fingering it, feeling its edges, holding it in his hands, piece by piece. When at last he had finished he murmured to himself. And what he murmured had nothing to do with money and nothing to do with silk. "I cannot understand why an old man who has striven all his life should not retain one daughter to fill his tea bowl."

Then he thought, I must bow to my fate which is the market price of silk. Thereupon he summoned his adopted son and his daughter.

Said he, "The profits of the farm for the past twelve moons will not feed us for another twelve. The boy's work cannot be spared. If the boy goes those left are lost and he, too, might starve. If my daughter is sold she will be fed and we, too, may be."

It therefore befell that he called in one to bid for his daughter. The crafty dealer, seeing the old man was nearly blind, cheated him.

"This child is of little value," he said. "She is ugly."

The father, of his own will, showed no expression. But the flesh of his face crumbled with disappointment.

"Is she then ugly? This last one, that I cannot see, was the most precious to me; and I pictured her face as fair as the moon."

"She will be of no use," went on the dealer, "except as a common serving maid to a lady of distinction."

The old man's face was released from its falling.

"It is better so," he said. "The fates know best. This is clearly an occasion when lightness of the pocket is not injurious to the soul."

So Tinkling Laughter wended the long way that many loads of golden cocoons had wended. She was swiftly carried by relays of running coolies to the town of far Ke-Pong.

She was taken to a part of the town that is enclosed within gilded gates. The aged are not found within it. Yet none who enter may return. For the proper dwelling after the Place of Gilded Shadows is the place of all shadows.

Dressed in rich silks and scented with sweet odours sat the girl in a luxurious apartment. Yet she was without delight and her mind was empty except when she thought of a number; and the number she thought of was the number of footsteps to Ke-Pong.

Once, by accident, a man dropped a book of poetry within her screen. She read a poem:

There was a little flowering tree
That saw the sun in one direction;

Its blossoms all looked one way.
A wall was built beside the tree
It could not see the sun,
Now the tree is barren, barren.
I know the white man's plague of love;
Western hearts are used to loving
And may love and love again;
But an Eastern heart is broken, broken.

The poetry made her think of a number and the number she thought of was the number of footsteps to Ke-Pong.

After she had been within the gilded gates several days, it happened at nightfall that a boy came crawling into Ke-Pong, ragged and with bleeding feet. At last he reached the gates, but being without money could not enter. Music came stealing from within but left the glow of lantern light behind, and all was darkness without. He spread his mat under cover of the stars and lay down.

Once, after nightfall, as Tinkling Laughter sat listening to music, her heart lost one beat to the three stringed *shuhmishen*, for she thought of her number which was the number of footsteps to Ke-Pong; and lo, the number had run to nothing like melted snow.

"He is without," she thought.

He stayed outside. There was no means of entry except much money. Night after night he spread his mat beneath the stars. And day after day he waited.

Never was he absent from his post for longer than a few moments, and there he would have starved to death but for a few copper coins that rich men occasionally tossed him in pitying contempt as to a common beggar.

One day, when the girl had received a lover who was fat and rich but extraordinarily ugly, she was given as reward a piece of money for her own, with which she might have bought beads or scent or crystallized cherries.

Instead, she bribed a servant. Escape was impossible. It would have meant the servant's death. But he undertook to deliver this signed letter to the boy waiting at the gates.

My Betrothed,

Do not linger starving at the gates. My fate is locked and the key is broken. Return to the farm and earn your bread; also honourably help my father. Tell him she I am with is kindly.

This is to comfort thee. The deities who bestow the gift of life evidently have many thousand thousands at their disposal; surely they will spare me another for the one that is spoilt. I will live my life again.

Tinkling Laughter.

There is, in the town of Ke-Pong, a sombre square of grey stone houses, quiet and secluded and far removed from the noises of the bazaar, where dwell European gentlemen engaged on scholastic research in the East. The square has a commonplace European name of no import; but more usually is it known by its native name of Place of Highly Respected Fools.

There died, at his house in the square, a gentleman of great renown for his collection of Chinese pottery. He died a natural death, of heart failure, and evidently knocked over one of his choicest specimens as he fell forward in his chair; for it was found broken before him.

He was unmarried and all his life had eschewed the society of women, preferring to devote himself to beautiful vases. Since it was reported in the newspapers of London, Paris and New York that his collection represented a lifetime well spent, the inference is that his exchange of the love of women for the love of china was a good one.

At the sale by auction, that succeeded his death, some beautiful specimens were purchased for museums. His last acquisition, and finest of all, was the one broken. Of this the pieces had been gathered together and saved.

It had not, however, been considered possible that the broken pieces might be sold till two old friends of the dead man made an offer for them. By them it was thought worth while to reassemble the pieces into some semblance of their original beauty. They approached the house in the Place of Highly Respected Fools to collect their purchase.

"A unique piece," declared the one who had seen it, "of extraordinary loveliness bearing on one side a female figure."

"Yes you say he was unable to place it as regards period and workmanship."

"You must remember he had not had it long."

Arrived at the house, they were conducted to a room and offered the pieces of the vase, by an obsequious Chinese servant, for inspection before packing.

The man who had already seen the vase, and had recommended the purchase, picked up this piece and that, with enthusiasm, pointing out the beauty of details which he recognized. But soon a bewildered expression grew and deepened on his face.

"I do not see the female figure," he declared in amazement.

And every examination of the pieces, even to their subsequent assemblage into their original form, failed to disclose it. Yet the figure of the maiden had stood nearly as high as the vase, which itself was almost tall as a man.

Declaration that such a figure had existed was found in the dead man's own memoranda as so 'figure-female.' Even so, with the concrete evidence of the reassembled vase before his eyes, the buyer believed that both the dead man and he must have been curiously mistaken.

Yet these strange matters were compatible, as all true things are compatible. For the understanding of this it is necessary to recount the history of the vase, as it affected him in the Place of Highly Respected Fools, from the beginning.

The lover of vases, when visiting a market, noticed a large vase of transcendent beauty. It stood on the sandy ground of the open market place surrounded by common pots. He approached and examined it closely while the seller sat silent and apparently disinterested.

The thing puzzled him. He could not place its period or workmanship. Its shape was tall and graceful; its surface flawless. All around its base was depicted the flat spread of the ricefields, with here and there a little pagoda, and over the fields were birds flying low.

Its important decoration, however, was to be viewed from one side only. It was the figure of a maiden. So proportionately large was this figure, that were it not that Asiatic art denies perspective, she would be presented as occupying the very foreground.

The upper half of the vase, which represented sky and

air, was greyish with floating mists and its glaze was of an incomparably lovely pearly texture. The season in the ricefields was the season of dying.

"What is its price?" he asked; and was surprised when the man mentioned a large sum. For he thought a seller of such common pots would be unaware of his single treasure.

"Tell me more of this vase then," said he, "and what makes it of so great value."

"It is sold as it stands," replied the man, "with its history unknown and also its destiny. Its unworthiness is before your eyes, yet being but a pot it fails to sink into the ground at the withering scorn of your gaze. Its cost is all I have said, though I well know a man had better die than pay such a price."

Without further useless argument the deal was closed and the buyer, engaging a rickshaw, insisted on carrying his purchase away in his arms.

The vase so puzzled him that after a while he decided to seek the seller and make a more determined effort to gain information concerning it. For that purpose to the market he repaired and this is what he heard.

There had been a man in the market who had sold a vase of rare quality for far more than its value and then had departed, leaving his common pots strewn on the ground for any who would pick them up and carry them away.

"When can I see him?" asked the connoisseur. "When does he visit the market?"

He visited the market, so they said, and dealt heavily but none knew he had been till he had gone. He comes like one who might arrive to-morrow and goes like one who already departed yesterday.

Without doubt I have been cheated as to price, thought the connoisseur, yet its exquisite beauty remains as the evidence of my own eyes.

The spell of the beautiful vase grew upon him. For it possessed what all his vast array of others lacked. It possessed mystery. Its origin proved incalculable.

Because of its spell that held him he bought no more. Only he sat in his house and speculated concerning his last purchase.

His inactivity was not understood. It was said, he is growing old.

One day, as he sat with the vase drawn up before him, he looked full in the face of the maiden. She looked weary. He thought, I wonder if her pictured age is older than I thought.

He looked at the vase curiously. The pearly glaze, that had so delicately shadowed the mists drifting over the scenery, seemed to have perished, leaving a hard clearness. As his gaze sought the detail he started violently. For it was changed. The season in the ricefields was the season of death.

In the exasperation of his bewilderment he addressed the pale weary face of the maiden. "Creature, what are you?" And his question unsealed her lips and she answered.

"No potter made me; no potter in the world. I am a woman."

He leaned forward and gazed at the vase in astonishment; nor, after a moment, did he really believe it had spoken. For the figure, under his gaze, was again as silent as ever.

At last he sighed and murmured aloud, "After all, she is only a picture on a vase."

At this she spoke again in low passionate tones. "And why," said she, "am I only so? Know you not that this vase, my prison, is no potter's work, but the creation of your own soul?" She sighed wearily. "And here am I stretched upon it. My limbs ache with the coldness of this pottery and my heart is frozen like a stone."

"But how have I done this?" he cried.

"Because I am your fated loved one from the beginning of time, and how else could I seek you who love only pots?"

He was stricken with remorse.

"Maiden, leave your thraldom," he begged.

She chanted a prayer after her own fashion. "Oh, spirit that revives the ricefields year after year, come to my aid."

Then did the sun shine on the vase, and the little pagodas glittered in the light. The sides of the vase tinkled delicately with the twitter of birdsong, and the season in the ricefields was the season of the springing of life.

The maiden stretched out her arms and as she did so the vase parted into pieces and clattered to the floor around her. Lifting her feet she stepped upon the pieces.

The old man stretched out his arms in longing to the maiden, whose lovely face and body still glowed warmly with the sunshine from the vase.

"Instead of the wasted years, spent on pots, give me life and love."

But the maiden, stepping softly, passed into nothingness: yet, in passing, she kissed him lightly and said, "Like the spirit of the ricefields I will come again."

Copy

BY GWYN JONES

I

Miss SILVIA EDE to Mr. Geoffrey Keames.

The Elms,

Brunton Friary,
Cheshire.

2nd April, 193—.

Geoffrey Keames, Esq.,
c/o Messrs. Wiggins and Blow, Ltd.,
Sweetpea Street,
Covent Garden, W.C.2.

DEAR SIR,

I am writing to tell you what great pleasure I derived from your novel, *The Rainbow Montage*, which I have only just finished reading. I don't think I have ever enjoyed a book more, and I am still quite unable to say whether I think most of the extraordinarily clever plot, the brilliant characterisation, or the rare quality of the style. As one who dabbles herself, I really feel I am qualified to greet your great achievement, and to recognise the work of one who should yet place himself among the ranks of the greatest masters of our literature. You must have letters from a great number of admirers of your work, but never from one who more sincerely wishes you well.

Once again, with many thanks and with sincerest wishes for your future,

Yours very truly,
SILVIA EDE.

II

Mr. Geoffrey Keames to Miss Silvia Ede.

7th April, 193—.

DEAR MISS EDE,

I was very pleased to get your letter, and to know that you thought so highly of my novel, *The Rainbow Montage*. There is no greater satisfaction for an author than to know that his work is bringing pleasure to many. I thank you for your good wishes, and trust you will allow me to return them, just as sincerely.

Yours very truly,

GEOFFREY KEAMES.

III

Conclusion of a letter from Mr. Geoffrey Keames to Mr. George Whitehead.

7th April, 193—.

. . . have just been replying to my fan mail. To be precise, a letter from a woman in some benighted provincial hole. How do people survive in these ghastly places, George, when there's good old Bloomsbury full of such charming people? I'll be finding admirers in Golders Green next!

See you soon,

GEOFF.

IV

Miss Silvia Ede to Mr. Geoffrey Keames.

10th April, 193—.

DEAR MR. KEAMES,

I was very pleased to receive your charming letter yesterday. You see, after I had written to you I felt quite ashamed I had done so, and if I could have called

the letter back through the post, I'm sure you would never have received it. I thought that an author like yourself would be too busy to bother with it, or perhaps even annoyed to receive it, though I'm certain if I received any letters after the one or two poor things I have had published, I should be quite wild with delight. Certainly I never expected to be lucky enough to receive a letter in your own handwriting. Most authors, I'm sure, would have sent just a typewritten couple of lines. It makes me wonder whether you use a typewriter, or whether, like me, you find it easier to compose with the pen. But now, perhaps, I am just being curious, and I must stop.

With sincere thanks for your good wishes. I hope you didn't mind my letter.

Yours very truly,

SILVIA EDE.

PS. I have been reading your book again. I don't know however you thought out so clever a plot, so clear and yet not a bit ordinary, and so completely unvulgarised !

v

Mr. Geoffrey Keames to Miss Silvia Ede.

12th April, 193—.

DEAR MISS EDE,

Of course I did not mind your letter. I was very happy to receive it. Everyone likes to have his work praised—the author who doesn't can't be human. As for the typewriter—I must confess it isn't often I answer even so pleasant a letter as yours by any other means, though, after what you say, I'm glad I broke the rule in this case ! I should advise you, though, not to read my book any more. There are only a few books—all masterpieces—that grow better and better with re-

reading, as I expect you've found. I am interested in what you say about finding it easier to compose with the pen. It shows how different authors are, doesn't it ?

With best wishes for your writing,

Sincerely yours,

GEOFFREY KEAMES.

VI

Miss Silvia Ede to Mr. Geoffrey Keames.

15th April, 193—.

DEAR MR. KEAMES,

It was very kind of you to wish me well as a writer, though I don't know, I'm sure, whether I shall ever do anything worth while. Sometimes I have hopes, when I think I've made what most people would call a good start, but more often I'm a little downcast to find that I cannot see my way clear to produce a distinctive, cleverly-contrived piece of work like yours, for example. At least, I don't mean to say I could ever write anything so powerful or, in places, so bitter as *The Rainbow Montage* (it is far above anything I have in mind), but I mean something on a smaller scale, only with a fine subject. Sometimes overnight I seem to think out the loveliest plots, but in the morning they don't quite work out. Still, I feel sure I have it in me to do something out of the rut. I'm sure I envy you your gift of working out a strong story so beautifully. My own work so far has been so much slighter—so much less immense, if you understand me—and though it has been praised highly by some very good judges, I cannot really feel satisfied with it. I expect you are one of those lucky people who never feel like that. You know the value of your work, and that is everything. As I say, I envy you—though not in a mean spirit, naturally.

But I am talking far too much about myself. It could hardly be expected that the author of *The Rainbow Montage* should be very interested in the work of one who probably presumes when she styles herself a fellow writer. It is like the story of the Lion and the Mouse, perhaps, with me as the Mouse—and a very daring one at that!

I have not yet thanked you for your second letter. It was more than kind of you to write it. You need not fear I shall think less of *The Rainbow Montage*, though I read it again and again. I have settled now what I admire most in the book—it is the character of Edith Bellen. I believe that in her you have created one of the great heroines of fiction. She is the Juliet of the novel, and I'm sure I was never more affected by a real death than by hers. Her relationship to Evan, too, though perhaps illicit, is not only wonderfully portrayed, but is absolutely true to life—a rare thing! I feel inside me—and in these matters a woman can trust her judgment—that it is exactly how a real woman would act in those circumstances. A real woman, that is, and one not afraid to live!

But I am writing far too much. As it is, I expect you will be bored with this.

Yours very sincerely,
SILVIA EDE.

VII

Mr. Geoffrey Keames to Miss Silvia Ede.

20th April, 193—.

DEAR MISS EDE,

I wonder why you should think me bored with your letter? I found it most interesting. What you have to say about your literary labours has quite caught my

fancy. I wish you would tell me more about them, or, better still, let me know where I can get hold of them. You see, I've been at work on *The Rainbow Montage* so long and so intensely that I'm a little out of touch with contemporary work. I'm sure I have a great treat in store. Be comforted—you are not the only one to know that sense of dissatisfaction and inability to get at the best inside one. I know how I felt while writing *The Rainbow Montage*—as though I could never get down on paper the brilliant ideas that were always occurring to me—as though they must be dulled in the expression.

I think you are right about Edith Bellen. She is the best thing in the book, though, myself, I can't help a sneaking regard for Evan's father, especially that scene where he is so badly treated by the very people to whom he had earlier given every penny of his savings. There's the symbolical passage towards the end, too. Perhaps that cost me most to write. The emotional strain was almost unbearable. I could hardly sleep for it, I remember. But you are right about Edith. Your judgment is sound there—which makes me think your own work far better than you would lead me to believe. Do let me know more about it.

With sincerest good wishes,

GEOFFREY KEAMES.

VIII

Miss Silvia Ede to Mr. Geoffrey Keames.

21st April, 193—.

DEAR MR. KEAMES,

Your letter was really too kind. I feel awfully nervous at the idea of you reading my work. Somehow one doesn't care when it appears before the world of

strangers, but after your letters I can no longer think of you as such, and that is why I feel as I do. I hope you get the package safely. I have registered it, of course. I have included two unpublished pieces, too, though I really oughtn't to take advantage of you like this and impose on your good nature. I confess I'm too excited to write any more, and must now be as patient as I can while awaiting your reply.

Yours gratefully,

SILVIA EDE.

IX

Part of a letter from Mr. Geoffrey Keames to Miss Silvia Ede.

30th April, 193—.

DEAR MISS EDE,

More than a week has gone by since I sent you a bare acknowledgment of receipt of your publications and manuscripts, and at last I am writing to tell you how much I enjoyed reading them. It would be unkind of me to keep that statement until some later passage of my letter, for I know you must feel as I did when first I exposed *The Rainbow Montage* to the criticism of a friend. I could hardly wait for his considered reply. Twenty times a day I felt like running across London to see him and hear from his own lips the inevitable praise or blame. Perhaps, too, it would have been better had I done so, for I remember he sent me an ill-judged and envious letter that put an end to our friendship. But you need have no fears of that sort, for I hasten to state my pleasure at having this opportunity of reading and then passing judgment upon your literary productions. To take them in order—I think with you, that the story in the *Chester Evening Gazette* is the best. It has

that charm of perception and delicacy of craftsmanship which are the most valuable feminine traits in literature, and the delightful, unstrained humour of the characters is above all praise. I am not surprised the *Chester Evening Gazette* asked you for a companion story. They say sequels are never so good as the original conception, but yours, like Daudet's immortal *Tartarin* volumes, is an exception to the rule. Then the story in the *Countryman's Round*—just the thing to convince me of the work you will yet produce. I thought the character of Effie in some respects like that of Edith Bellen—perhaps in the way she stakes all on her chance of love and happiness. The passage about the healing influences of the countryside was both tenderly conceived and warmly expressed. I don't quite know what to say about the poetry. It has the authentic note—that is, if I'm any judge—but might I just say, in the friendliest spirit, that few are capable of the highest flights in prose and verse. "That with no middle flight intends to soar, etc." You remember the passage? To which do you feel yourself most drawn—"The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling," or "The other harmony of prose," as the great poet so truly calls it? In either, I think you have a future, but ought you to expend your strength between two such exacting masters? . . . If any sentiment here expressed seems to you a little severe, please remember that if I were saying it and not setting it down in black and white, it would have no such connotation.

I am returning your manuscript by this same post. Thank you so much for letting me keep the published work. I have been greatly privileged to read it.

Yours, indeed,

GEOFFREY KEAMES.

X

Part of a letter from Miss Silvia Ede to Mr. Geoffrey Keames.

1st May, 193—

DEAR MR. KEAMES,

I opened your letter with fear and trembling, desirous and yet afraid to see what it contained. And now—however can I thank you enough? All the kind things you say—I know I don't deserve them, and yet I am woman enough to be thrilled and delighted! Is it silly of me? Or can you understand it?—As though the creator of Edith Bellen could not. . . . Indeed, what you say about the desirability of personal, verbal criticism is absolutely true. Every inflection of the voice means something, doesn't it? When I feel how well you understand my work and me, I do wish that I might be fortunate enough to one day meet the author of *The Rainbow Montage* in the flesh. Am I too bold? Not in these days of a more sensible relationship between the sexes, surely!

Perhaps I ought not to send this letter. But I will. Again with thanks and best wishes.

Your sincere friend and well-wisher,

SILVIA EDE.

PS. I have split a very bad infinitive, I see.

XI

Mr. Geoffrey Keames to Miss Silvia Ede.

2nd May, 193—

DEAR MISS EDE,

I write on impulse, with your letter before me. If, as I think there is in Silvia Ede much of my own Edith

Bellen, I ask you to meet me at Liverpool next Saturday evening, May the fifth. What happens then is on the lap of the gods.

Yours,

GEOFFREY KEAMES.

XII

Miss Silvia Ede to Mr. Geoffrey Keames.

3rd May, 193—.

DEAR GEOFFREY,

You see ! That is my answer ! I shall be at Liverpool to meet you. I have told my people that I shall be away over the week-end. It is weird to think that when first I read your wonderful novel I thought of myself as Edith Bellen, and dreamed that you might be Evan. I felt, indeed, that if ever I could share love's sweet mystery with anyone it would be the author of that wonderful book. But do not be alarmed by that word "love." We are modern people. We can meet and, if fate so wills it, we can part at once for ever. Which will be the case ? That is what we shall soon know.

Not adieu, but au revoir !

I am (Edith, I would say),

SILVIA.

PS. I suggest we meet on the landing stage, where the Egremont ferry boats come in. At what time ? You will know me by my fur coat of grey squirrel, with a red flower, small red hat, and small hand case.

XIII

Mr. Geoffrey Keames to Miss Silvia Ede

4th May, 193—.

DEAR SILVIA,

I have your letter before me as I write. We will meet as you say. You will recognise me easily. I shall be

wearing a brown overcoat and hat and a red flower, too. Strange to think I am to meet one who might have been the original of my Edith Bellen. I will write no more now. Does it seem quite real to you? But that it will *prove* a precious reality, I am confident.

GEOFFREY KEAMES.

XIV

Conclusion of a letter from Mr. Geoffrey Keames to
Mr. George Whitehead.

26th May, 193—.

Too long already, I know, but I must tell you about a rather queer business I've taken part in these last six or seven weeks. Remember I told you I'd received my one and only fan letter from some crack-brained female in Cheshire? Well—that's the beginning of the story. I wrote back the usual thing (or what in my ignorance of the fan world I thought such), but that didn't satisfy her ladyship, who wrote to me again. You know my kind heart—I replied a bit more fully, and that led to more letters on both sides, until within three weeks she was sending me drivel of her own to read, and I was giving it my blessing. I judged her a product of spinsterhood plus Freud, poor thing—felt sorry for her, and all that. Anyhow, it went on until at last she suggested I should meet her in Liverpool, on the landing stage by the romantic river, one Saturday evening, whereupon we'd week-end it at one of the hotels there. As I say, I felt sorry for her, so I agreed. Mind, I'm not saying my conduct was entirely copy-book, but it was all with the best of intentions, I assure you —oh, quite! Besides, I'm too old an hand with the women to get myself into trouble, as you know. But now

imagine me in Liverpool, waiting at the trysting place fifteen minutes before the hour ! You know how one gets nervy, thinks better of it, and so on ?—Well, I stepped aside a bit, and determined to see without being seen, and Jove be thanked that I did ! She was there at five to the hour, dressed exactly as she had said, in a cheap looking grey squirrel coat, red hat, and a little handcase that looked like business. But the woman herself ! I don't want to say anything caddish—you know me better than that, George—but honestly now, there are some things a man owes to himself. What would you have done ?—So did I. Came back that night, a couple of pounds down on the deal. Since when I've heard nothing.

But I hope to get that £2 back. It's given me the idea for a first-rate story. I kept copies of my letters, and with the least doctoring they'll do. Not so dumb, eh ? *The Rainbow Montage*, you ask ? I'm afraid she's the only one who thought much of it, despite the boost you and a couple of others gave me. I'll always have a kindly feeling for her on that account. It was too high-brow for the motley, I'm afraid. I think I'll stick to reviewing other people. I mean, I'm pretty well in with the *Morning Equator* and the old *Blunderbuss*.

See you at the Pot-Boil luncheon next Wednesday !

GEOFF.

XV

The Literary Editor of *The Best of the Month* to Mr.
Geoffrey Keames.

21st June, 193—.

DEAR SIR,

I return herewith your story "Copy." The circumstances of its rejection are, I think, such as to merit more

than the customary rejection slip. I think I should inform you that our July number, which will appear in three days' time, will contain a story precisely similar to yours, save for the circumstance that at the end it is the lady who waits near the meeting place on Liverpool landing stage and goes away when she finds that her idolized author is—I quote her words—"a petty figure, his face redeemed from viciousness only by its extreme vacuity, his personality mediocre in everything but its mediocrity, the whole man rather like a bowler hat decorated with a hen's feather." Naturally, we communicated with the writer, Miss Silvia Ede, who assures us that her copy is in every way original, and that she will undertake full legal responsibility for any difficulty that may arise from its publication.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN FRIENDSHIP.

Literary Editor.

The Animals' Fair

BY J. G. COZZENS

MISS MONK had handsome dark-brown eyes. Although she was nothing like as old as that, her hair was almost entirely white. This gave her face a curious, clean, tanned appearance. She had a light graceful figure, and though she could not have been called pretty, she was a pleasant person to look at. Moreover, she and I were old friends, for I was one of the members of the eighth grade who, five years earlier, had been in the third grade when Miss Monk was teaching that. I knew, because she had told me so, that she had to rely a lot on old academy boys like myself, and I was always glad to help her out.

On the day, a couple of weeks after school opened that fall, Hicksey first appeared at the academy, Miss Monk glanced over the class at recess and signalled to me. I stopped at her desk and she said, "John, this is Emerson Hicks. I want you to show Emerson around and hold him to feel at home."

As it was meant to, this gave me a feeling of importance and responsibility which I greatly enjoyed. I said, "Yes, Miss Monk." Also, it gave me a good look at Emerson Hicks. I had been trying to get one ever since I raced in, about five seconds late, and noticed only when I was past him that somebody new had the desk in the second row, heretofore empty. I had spent a good deal of time speculating on the back of the new-

comer's head—which was small, and a dusty, silvery blond. His hair, I observed now, had a kind of crinkly ripple or wave in it. Emerson Hicks' nose and cheeks were covered with small pale freckles, which made his face much the same dusty tone as his head. His eyes were a very bright, arresting blue. I decided that he was all right, and, since he was rather small, that I could certainly lick him. Not that I had any intention of trying, nor that I liked fighting, but I was, as we said, eleven going on twelve, and the atavistic savage, unsubdued, wisely took notes for war in time of peace. I said, "Oh, hello." I put out my hand a little uncertainly and, bumping his, gave it as hard a grip as I could.

What Emerson Hicks thought at first glance I shall never know. I suspect, for he was a shrewd little boy, that he sized me up at once as promising material. It isn't likely that he named or clearly classified such points, but he doubtless took in the fact that I was naturally bossy and vain, that I had not been around much; that under my officious manner I was timid and uncertain. Thus reassured, he squeezed my hand back, entirely at ease. We went out of the classroom, down the wide, echoing stairs, which were lined on one side with twenty-eight large engravings of the Presidents of the United States, with their signatures in facsimile under each. I could see Emerson Hicks looking at them; not with interest, exactly, but with an automatic attention, not missing anything. Neither of us had said a word until we reached the main hall. He suddenly asked then: "What was her name?"

When I realized what he was talking about, I answered, "Oh, Miss Monk."

Emerson Hicks' blue eyes rested on me with a shining

pleasure. "The elephant sneezed," he whispered in a low sing-song voice, "and fell on his knees, and what became of the monk, the monk——" He giggled. Seeing me staring at him with perplexed suspicion, he added, "It's a song. I thought everybody knew that. I'll teach it to you."

"All right," I answered, though not with enthusiasm, for I didn't think the song made any sense, and the obvious jibe at Miss Monk failed to strike me as funny.

The academy was one of those advanced and enlightened schools with methods then fairly new. I suppose I was living proof of one form of their success; for, though most of their theories greatly encouraged my strong inclination to waste my time and to do only that part of my work which I could do with little or no effort, I did not hate school, and it had never crossed my mind that a teacher was my natural enemy.

Not liking Emerson Hicks very well, I said, "Well, what do you want to see? That's the fourth grade in there. And the fifth grade over there. And down here is the reception room and Mr. Apgar's office. At the end, that opens onto the gallery in the gymnasium; and——"

"I know," Emerson Hicks said. There had been a brief flicker of surprise or curiosity in his glance. He smiled in a very friendly and engaging way and dropped the subject of Miss Monk. "I saw the gymnasium," he said. "Come on. Let's go outside."

We came out on the wide sandstone steps and he stood a moment, sniffing the sharp October air, considering the groups playing in the big yard. The academy was a massive building of red brick, here and there overgrown with ivy. It stood on a sloping plot of ground, a couple of acres of banked lawn

hedged with high privet in front and up the side. Behind, it backed against a higher street, with deep areaways bridged by railed concrete entries to doors on the second floor. Emerson Hicks looked at all this carefully. Then he said, "Let's go to that store at the corner."

"No, we can't," I answered. "We aren't allowed to leave the grounds at recess."

"It would be a cinch," he said. "You could go through there and out along the hedge without them seeing you. What do they do to you if you do?"

"Oh, I don't know," I responded. "You might get sent to Mr. Apgar."

"What's he do to you?"

"Plenty," I said, though the truth was I did not know. I regarded Mr. Apgar with awe. He was a large, rather tall and stately man. His broad mild face was crowned by a dense high pompadour of well-combed black hair. His manner of speaking was slow and impressive. Monday mornings the school started the week with an assembly, and Mr. Apgar would come into the auditorium wearing what I later learned was a Master of Arts gown. At the time it impressed me all the more, for I could not imagine what it was. In a sober voice he read the part from the eighth chapter of Proverbs about knowledge rather than choice gold. Then he coughed and made a few solemn announcements. The only other glimpses I got of him were accidental—momentarily, through an open door, I might see him sitting at the extensive polished desk in his office, looking over papers which his secretary, Miss Tyrrell, was handing to him. Sometimes, effacing myself as much as possible, I would pass him in the halls. I suppose I must have been shown to him when

I first came to the academy, but I couldn't remember that we had ever exchanged a word.

Emerson Hicks said, "Listen: at one school where I went once, the principal would wallop you with a stick so you couldn't sit down for a week." What he had seen of the academy doubtless satisfied him that no such barbarities were likely to be practiced here. "Come on," he said. "We should worry!"

He had judged me very well. In the face of his airy tone and manner, I did not see how I could refuse without, in the humiliating presence of a person not so big as I was, reflecting injuriously on my courage and spirit. "All right," I agreed. "I'm certainly not worried if you're not."

We got back before the bell—safely, I decided, to my relief, as we went in the side entry. However, when I was in my seat, with the period started, I looked at Miss Monk and began to wonder. I could very soon see that all was not well. Soon after I entered, Miss Monk eyed me gravely a moment. After that she never looked in my direction until the last bell rang. She beckoned to me then. "Wait," she told me "I want to speak to you."

I stood, ill at ease, while the room emptied. When we were alone she said, "John, I'm very much disappointed in you."

I attempted an expression of innocent wonder, but it was poorly simulated, for I could feel in my pocket the lump made by the bag of jelly beans. Emerson Hicks had munificently bought two, one for him and one for me.

From where I sat, I had been able to see Emerson, with a highly accomplished technique, eating his. After Miss Monk's first disturbing glance, I had decided to leave mine untouched; not only because my appetite

for them had departed, but because, when I feared that I had been caught doing something I ought not to do, it was an idea of mine that I could better matters by behaving in all other respects with ostentatious virtue.

Miss Monk continued, "Why did you take Emerson down to the store? It's not a bit like you, John. I've always said to myself: 'I know John is a boy I can trust.' Don't you see how it makes me feel when you deliberately——"

The outcome was that I lost my privilege of being the one to collect homework papers when they were called for, and got down to the lunchroom so late that the only dessert left was tapioca. Though my sense of self-importance was dashed by the loss of my informal office, and I was genuinely aggrieved about the tapioca, I did not feel that I had been unjustly treated. I merely repented the folly of falling in with Emerson Hicks' suggestion.

When I discovered that he had got through his own lunch without waiting, or showing any interest in my fate, I was, in addition, indignant and offended. "All right for him," I told myself sombrely while I took a tray and collected my food. While I ate I was busy imagining various scenes and conversational exchanges in which I injured or tellingly humiliated him. I was too absorbed to notice when Elizabeth Jones, a large strong girl from my class, paused in front of me on her way out. She got my attention by giving my head a shove. I started half up in anger, but she skipped heavily aside, jeering, "Well, smarty! You thought nobody saw you. Miss Monk saw you from the corner window all the time."

She gave me no time to make a response, and, indeed, I could not think of any to make. When I wandered

glumly out into the hall afterward, almost the first person I saw was Emerson Hicks. I met him with a hostile look. He winked at me. "Come on," he whispered.

I said indignantly. "Like fun! I—"

From his pocket he produced an object the colour of gun metal. I got only a glimpse of it, but I was able to recognize a water pistol of an expensive and desirable type.

"You'd better not shoot that around here," I said. "You'd better not take it into class. If Miss Monk spots it you'll have to hand it in. And you won't get it back either."

"Come on," he said, "we'll go down to the washroom and fill it."

I tagged along unwillingly. While he was immersing the pistol in a basin, letting it suck up water, he said, "How'd she catch you?" His tone was sympathetic but casual, as though I, too, were hardened to the fortunes of war, and it would take more than that to down me.

Enjoying this novel view of myself, I shrugged and said, "Oh, Elizabeth Jones snitched on me, I guess."

"Which one is she?" he inquired, lifting the water pistol from the basin and squinting down the barrel. "The big fat lummox?"

I nodded, interested in his pistol. "We'll get her for that," he said, with assurance. He held the pistol out to me. "Want to try it?" he asked generously.

As I had foretold, before school was out Miss Monk had the pistol. Aiming under his desk, Hicksey—he had already told me that he was to be called that; that only girls, sissies and teachers called him Emerson—picked a moment when Elizabeth Jones was standing to recite to drive the thin jet of water against the back

of her ankle where the top of her buttoned shoe met her brown lisle stocking. It made her yell, all right, and the shot was a remarkable one, but it was obvious who did it.

Hicksey gave up his weapon with composure, and Miss Monk kept him afterward to explain that at the academy we didn't do things like that. She probably thought Emerson just didn't understand, especially after I had set him such a bad example in the morning. I was, naturally, not present at the interview, but I'm sure that Hicksey put on a good show—not of the amateur, pretending-he-hadn't-done-anything sort, but a subtler, embarrassed business of its being all just a foolish impulse, for which he was really sorry. He shouldn't have done it, and he didn't try to excuse himself, but you could see he meant no actual harm, and he was touched and much impressed by what was being said to him, for he looked you straight in the eye, like the manly little fellow he was—somewhat shame-faced, yet in brave agreement. I'm sure Miss Monk accepted it all and was pleased with his attitude. For myself, I mistook the whole matter for simple bad judgment—just throwing away a good water pistol. To Hicksey it must have been a necessary reconnaissance in force, a demonstration to make Miss Monk develop her strength and position.

I duly waited to hear how this came out, but, waiting, I got into a game, and so missed Hicksey. The next day he was cordial enough, only I soon found that he was making friends with several other boys. This left him little time for me. He had realized that though I was bigger than he was, there were boys in the class bigger than I was, or, if no bigger, none the less more than a match for me. Of course, he meant to find out if one of them would make a more useful best friend.

When he decided not, as he did suddenly about two weeks later, it must have been because whatever else he was offered, he had found no one so amenable and easily impressed. I had been offended by his neglect and was cool toward him. That made no difference. Coming up from the gymnasium period one afternoon, he got himself into line next to me, gave me one of his winks. He put his hand to his mouth and spit out a wad of gum. When the file of girls came from their locker rooms and we were moving in the constricted stairs from the basketball floor, I saw him eyeing Elizabeth Jones. By crowding on the way up, he got almost abreast of her. At the dark turn he made an effort to clap the wad of gum into her hair.

I wished Elizabeth Jones all possible bad luck. I appreciated the friendly gesture on Hicksey's part. Yet I would have dissuaded him if he had let me see what he was planning to do before he did it. I knew Elizabeth Jones. Girl or no girl, she was hefty, and wouldn't take it lying down.

As it proved, Elizabeth was also quick. Exactly what happened was lost in the shadow, but some intuition must have warned her. She wheeled, ducking her head aside, and caught Hicksey by the wrist. She bumped him so suddenly and hard against the wall that she was able to force his hand up before he recovered, and so to get the gum into Hicksey's own hair. With her other hand she smacked him across the cheek.

It created only an instant's disturbance. Both lines were jostled a little, but they kept moving. Not many people had really seen it, though I heard Katherine Boyd, her small, pretty face wrinkled with mirth, giggle, "Serves you right!"

Hicksey was scarlet, not only at his failure but at the appalling disgrace of learning, as he must have, that Elizabeth Jones was twice as strong as he was. He could not speak for a moment. Then he muttered to me, "Gee, I can't hit a girl back, can I?" implying hopefully that all that saved her was his chivalry and forbearance. A boy named Geoffrey Allen, behind me, said eagerly, "What'd she do?"

Hicksey muttered something more, dropped out, and ran down to the washroom. We were into class then, and with much presence of mind, I went straight to Miss Monk. I said that Emerson had to be excused a moment; so no formal notice was taken when he entered. I observed as he sat down, that he had been obliged to cut hair off the side of his head to get the gum out. Elizabeth Jones, at Miss Monk's desk with some papers, also saw it. She gave Hicksey a derisive grin, turned and started jauntily up the aisle, still grinning.

Hicksey had gazed back at her with miraculous blandness, as though he wondered what on earth she meant, so, perhaps, I ought to have realized that he had the situation well in hand. Instead, angry and indignant—for I had already forgotten Hicksey's neglect and my coolness—I saw a possible opportunity to fix Elizabeth. I didn't seriously hope for much, but, anyway, I shot my left leg out. As sometimes happens, unconsidered impulse served better than any careful plan. Still looking at Hicksey, Elizabeth Jones walked directly into the obstruction. Her other foot, which she had been lifting to complete the interrupted step, came forward fast in automatic reflex to save her balance. That bumped my leg, too, so she fell forward, flat in the aisle.

To any eighth grade, such a tripping is one of the supreme comic spectacles. No one who saw it could help laughing. I had to laugh myself, but I got out no more than a quick giggle. Scrambling up, Elizabeth turned in main fury, like an Amazon, on me. I slid from my seat with a hasty side motion, putting the desk between us, poised ready for emergencies. Perhaps fortunately for me, none arose. Elizabeth Jones had to realize that she was hurt. Her knee and elbow had been banged hard enough to bring her up, wincing. The fight went out of her and she burst abruptly into furious, painful tears.

This produced an appalled hush.

"Excuse me," I stammered, not without sincerity, for though I had intended to trip her, I hadn't planned on anything so thorough and spectacular.

As Miss Monk had told Hicksey, at the academy, tricks of this kind and rough-housing in general were not common in class. As far as she knew, they were not much in my line anyway. For an instant she may have imagined that it was really an accident; but when she heard my "Excuse me," of course, she knew it wasn't. She gave me a shocked look, arising. She came down the aisle to see how badly Elizabeth was hurt. Then she motioned to Katherine Boyd, who stood up with earnest alacrity, and the three of them went into the hall.

"Gee, I never meant——" I began in a bashed general defence. A sharp-eyed, dark-haired girl named Mabel Parsons, whom I deeply disliked, said contemptuously, "Oh you ! You think you're so clever !"

Abashed, I looked toward Emerson Hicks. He was sitting calmly, without expression, and for an instant I thought he had turned against me too. Then, casually

he let an eyelid drop in his unmistakable wink. Setting both elbows on the desk, he put his hands together and shook them warmly.

"Oh, tell it to Sweeney!" I said to Mabel Parsons, for I had experienced one of my mercurial lifts in spirit and now saw the episode as a good job, well done. I sat down at my desk and waited defiantly.

Miss Monk came back soon. She was alone, which meant that Elizabeth had gone down to the nurse with Katherine Boyd, but it also meant that she was not hurt seriously, or Miss Monk would have gone down with her. I had been ready to be dealt with at once, and perhaps Miss Monk saw that I was, and deliberately let me wait. She simply took up the lesson and went on with it. Elizabeth Jones duly returned with some adhesive tape around her knee under the stocking and her arm stained with arnica, but nothing was said. By three o'clock, when the last bell rang and school was over, I no longer felt very defiant. By half past three I felt about the way I deserved to.

Against one wall in Miss Tyrrell's office there was a long wooden settee. Hicksey and I sat on it. I had been surprised to see Hicksey kept after school too. Hicksey had been a good deal more than surprised. He was injured and outraged. It was easy to guess that Elizabeth—or Katherine Boyd, more likely—had told about the chewing gum as a possible reason for my act, and Hicksey might reasonably have blamed them, or even me. Instead, though he came docilely, it was obvious that he held Miss Monk responsible. I could see his blue eyes fixed, narrow and reflective, on her back as she led us downstairs.

However angry he may have felt, Hicksey had seated

himself on the bench with quiet dignity. I think he had no nerves. As for me, I took no comfort from his company. My stomach, a large distressing lump, quaked and thrilled, making it hard for me to breathe the thin and tasteless air. From Mr. Apgar's office beyond kept coming the sounds of prolonged conversation. A good deal louder, a voice in my own head repeated knowingly, "Now you're going to get it. Now you're going to get it." I stared, while my sensations grew more and more intolerable, at the bookcase against the opposite wall. It had glass doors and was filled with bound volumes of some educational journal. On top was a bust marked Cicero. In despair I studied the bust until I noticed suddenly that someone had sometime given it a moustache, either in ink or crayon. The moustache had been rubbed off, but not entirely. With a kind of relief, I uttered an unplanned feeble giggle.

This brought me to Hicksey's attention. He had hitched himself along the bench until he was close to the door. He hissed now, "Shut up, will you? Can't you see I'm listening?" Apparently he misinterpreted my sickly laugh, for he added, "And look serious, you sap! Do you want to make him mad?"

Steps sounded and the door was drawn open. Hicksey had moved like magic on the bench, back toward me, composing his face into a meek, injured expression. Miss Monk came out and did not look at us. On her heels was Miss Tyrrell, who eyed us coldly and said only, "Go in now."

Hicksey stood up. His air was so solemn and guileless that he gave me quite a shock when, reaching the door, he hit me inconspicuously in the ribs with his elbow. Under his breath, he said. "You keep your trap shut!"

Mr. Apgar had been standing by the large window behind his desk, looking out at the afternoon sunlight on the playground. He turned with impressive deliberation. I could see Hicksey looking right back at him, but my own eyes fell immediately, for his sober brown ones made me wish I could get under something. When he said in his measured voice, "John, you may close the door," I stood like an idiot, unable to move. There was an awful silence.

"The door," Mr. Apgar said, still more deeply and carefully, "behind you." I turned, bumped into it, and somehow got it shut.

"Thank you," he said, with a ponderous politeness which set me shaking worse than ever. "Now you may sit down. Both of you."

Things have happened since which frightened me badly, and with much better reason, but I don't think I was ever again frightened to the degree I reached then. Mr. Apgar had begun to speak in his Monday-morning voice. I literally did not hear a word he was saying. The light from the window behind him was in my face and made it hard to see him clearly. Outside, the declining sunlight shone reddish on some bare treetops, and I tried to look at them instead of him. It was his voice finally stopping which startled me into partial awareness. After a little while, I realized that he had asked me a question. Having no idea what it was, I moved my head in a motion meant to combine yes and no. Mr. Apgar said then, "What about you, Emerson? Have you anything you want to say?"

I looked at Hicksey with a vague, remote curiosity. His face had pinkened to what looked like embarrassment. When he spoke, his voice was distressed and low:

J. G. MEZENS

"Well, gee, Mr. Apgar, only one thing——" He stopped as though he had thought better of it. "No, sir," he said.

"Come," said Mr. Apgar, ~~not unkindly,~~ "if you have something to say in your defence you owe it to yourself to say it. I want to hear it. That's the only way we can understand each other."

Hicksey seemed to be struggling with himself. Then, with an obvious brave resolve, he put his chin up as though he were facing a firing squad and intended his words to be a last statement. "Well, Mr. Apgar," he said, "it's just Miss Monk, I guess. Miss Monk always playing favourites, I mean. We don't think it's fair." He made a sound something like a gulp, but restrained himself stoically. "If she doesn't happen to like you——"

"Now, now," said Mr. Apgar gently, "when you try to put chewing gum in a girl's hair, you are not making yourself very likeable. No one likes a boy who behaves that way."

On Hicksey's face spread an expression of alarm and anguish. Noting it, Mr. Apgar said, "Or haven't I understood you, Emerson? What did you mean?"

Hicksey composed himself. He started to mutter, but his voice cleared suddenly and he proved to be saying, "—wasn't trying to get out of anything. I just mean, why we did it. Sort of seeing Elizabeth Jones getting away with things all the time, I guess it made us sore. And then—well, like before we knew it—I didn't say it was any excuse or anything——"

"I see," said Mr. Apgar. He sat silent, his large sober face turned steadily on Hicksey, while Hicksey, red but resolute, met his eye. "I see," he repeated at last. "Of course, you're right. That is no valid excuse. But

I am glad that you explained how you felt. All of us sometimes feel impulses of anger or jealousy. What we must do is learn to control them." He took up a paper knife from his desk and looked at it a moment. He put it down then, arose, and, ignoring us, stood gazing out the window a little while. When he turned around he said, "Now, I think we will all forget about this. I feel that you are both sorry. That is the principal thing. To-morrow I want each of you to go to Elizabeth Jones and apologize to her for your ungentlemanly conduct. John, I want you to apologize to Miss Monk for disturbing the class." He paused. Then he said, "I think that will be all." He reached and pressed a button on his desk. Miss Tyrrell opened the door.

"Good night, boys," he said, inclining his head.

"Good night, sir," we said, or rather Hicksey did. I made a kind of croak. We turned and stiffly we walked past Miss Tyrrell to the outer door. The hall was deep in late-afternoon shadows. There was no one in sight, and no sound in the big building but the bump and shuffle made by Dennis, the janitor, or some of his assistants while they swept some classroom.

"Jimminy crickets!" whistled Hicksey softly. He gave an exultant skip, and suddenly, with a skill and ease I had to admire, turned a cartwheel down the twilit hall.

"You'd better not go doing stunts," I told him, "not in the building."

A fountain pen had dropped clattering out of his pocket in the process and now he returned to pick that up. "Oh, you kid!" he said, giving me a push.

My various emotional ups and down had left me shaky and irritable. "Quit it!" I cried. "What's so wonderful?"

"Didn't you get it?" he asked, pausing.

"Get what?"

"Brains he has nix!" said Hicksey.

"I suppose you know a lot," I answered, sullen.

"Well, she'd better go easy, see? I can fix her, all right. At one school I went to once, I got a teacher who picked on me fired, see?"

"Yes, you did!" I said. "Just because we happened to get away with it this time, don't think—"

"We?" said Hicksey. "You didn't get away with anything. You were so scared you—"

"Oh, was I?" I said. I was suddenly impelled to punch him. No doubt it hurt, for his cheek-bone stung my knuckles. "You big slob!" he cried. "Don't you hit me!" I started for him again, and he retreated. "All right," he said, his tone changing entirely, "I take it back. I'll show you whether you're scared or not. Come on."

I stood at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at him suspiciously, for already, just by the invitation, he had shown me whether I was scared or not. I was. His jubilant conspiratorial friendliness, replacing so suddenly his outraged yell, made me feel approximately the way a flyer who has just crashed must feel when, crawling, by a miracle, uninjured from the wreckage, he looks at a new 'plane which, for his soul's good, he is advised to take up right away.

"Where are you going?" I asked feebly.

"Come on. We aren't going to let her get away with sending us to the principal. We'll fix her an ink bomb."

"A what?" I said.

"Say, don't you know anything?" inquired Hicksey.

"You fix an ink bottle in her desk, so when she opens the drawer it shoots all over."

"She'll think right away we did it," I said gloomily, for, although I abhorred the whole idea, I knew, with a sort of sad fatality, that I was going to embark on it.

"Let her think!" said Hicksey. "When I fix something, believe me, she can think all she wants, but she can't prove anything. We'll show her she'd better leave us alone."

As I had foreseen, I went, lagging a little, upstairs after him. The still twilight of the swept and tidied classroom, the clean blackboards still damp from washing, gave me an ominous sense of being where I ought not to be. "No," I said faintly. "I'm not going to do it."

"You don't have to," Hicksey whispered, "if you'll just please give me your ink bottle. And look in my desk and get some thumbtacks and some big rubber bands, not the little ones." He watched me while I collected these things. "There's nothing to be scared of," he said impatiently. "There's no one on this floor." He opened the top drawer of Miss Monk's desk carefully. "Look," he said. "See what you do?"

"No," I said. I put the things down and moved away a little. "You go on and do it if you want to. I've done all I'm going to."

Hicksey looked pained. "Did I ask you to?" he pointed out. "I'm not scared. I'll do it. I've done it hundreds of times. I never got caught yet. You can bet your life I won't get caught this time." I don't know whether his choice of pronoun was conscious or unconscious, but, in any event, I was far too agitated for it to make an impression on me.

I was still agitated the following morning. When the weather was good I rode my bicycle to school, and usually I liked to arrive early, so that there would be plenty of time to fool around before class, but that morning I put off getting there as long as I possibly could. I think I was hoping that Miss Monk would try that drawer of Hicksey's and get the whole thing over before I appeared. This, it seemed to me, might somehow show that I didn't have anything to do with it.

I wasted what time I could getting to school, and when I got there, after I had locked my bicycle in the long rack in the basement hall, I gave it a thorough, needless tightening up until the first bell rang. After that I washed my hands, which didn't leave any spare time. I raced upstairs. I had gained the turn of the second flight, still at full speed, when I saw, to my consternation, Mr. Apgar's monumental, sombrely-clad figure moving with precise dignity around the corner and into the eighth-grade classroom.

This brought me up, stumbling, and I scraped my shin on the next step. Clasping the injury in anguish, I was not too occupied to jump to alarming conclusions—somebody had seen us last night; Mr. Apgar had reconsidered his decision to do nothing about yesterday's matter; the so-called ink bomb had gone off and Miss Monk had sent for Mr. Apgar to question the class. I climbed the last few steps numbly, as though my feet and even my sore shin belonged to somebody else. I came quaking into the room.

To my vast relief, everything seemed to be in order. Miss Monk was standing by her desk with that immaculate, gracefully erect and alert air which so became

her, speaking calmly to Mr. Apgar, who bulked above her, inclining his torso a little in elephantine courtliness. Trying not to see Hicksey, I walked by with elaborate casualness, went past my seat on up the aisle until I got to Elizabeth Jones' desk. Not without a feeling of virtue, I looked her detestable large round face almost in the eyes, and said, "Sorry I tripped you yesterday. I beg your pardon." As I was praying it would, the second bell rang then and I was able to conclude the ceremony with a conscientious dash back to my seat.

Miss Monk said, "Quiet, please. Mr. Apgar has a few words to say to you about conduct in the library," I got in a deep grateful breath and relaxed, for I had not been in the library for weeks. I looked down, but there was a pause, and so I looked up. I was in time to see Mr. Apgar apparently ask Miss Monk for something. She nodded, and, horrified, I saw her put a hand toward the desk drawer.

Though I had not dared or cared to look at Hicksey, before, I did look at him now, stricken. For an instant Hicksey seemed perfectly placid, bright-faced, sitting straight in his seat, but, while I watched, the freckles started suddenly out on his cheeks. He had gone white. Looking where he looked, I saw the drawer must have stuck quite hard. Mr. Apgar, moving around to that side, said, "Allow me," in his majestic voice. He took the knob and gave it a powerful tug.

I suppose Hicksey's self-control had never been more magnificent. He, after all, knew what was going to happen. I almost yelled myself, though I had expected little more than an over-turned ink bottle. Doubtless Mr. Apgar's powerful pull greatly improved the effect. The drawer yielded suddenly. Into the air, perhaps

three feet above the level of the desk, the uncorked bottle sprang, spinning a wide gush of ink far and wide, over the desk, floor and Mr. Apgar.

In the room arose a sound like one tremendous drawn breath, and there was total silence. Though in itself the drenching of an unwary person with ink was certainly funny enough, we were not amused. We simply stared in horror, as though we expected a thunder-clap or the heavens to fall.

On Mr. Apgar the obligations of greatness rested easily. He took a handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped away the ink dripping from his chin. In a mild and measured voice, as though nothing had happened, he said to Miss Monk, "I must ask you to excuse me for a few minutes." Without any sign of haste, he walked to the door and disappeared.

Miss Monk had been standing frozen, not, I suppose, with quite our horrified sense of lese majesty, but with shock enough. It must have been hard for her to believe that such a thing could actually happen in a class of hers. To remain, as she did, perfectly self-possessed, was a feat. The phrase I vaguely associated with her appearance and manner I had heard my elders use. It was, cool as a cucumber.

First of all, she looked at the desk and floor, and then at the empty ink bottle, which had rolled to one side. Raising her eyes, she looked at us, her gaze travelling from face to face. In the end it settled on a boy sitting in the first row just in front of Hicksey. "Carl," she said quietly, "go down and find Dennis, please. I want him to clean up." She walked around to the front of her desk. "I am going to ask if anyone knows anything about this," she said. "Before I find out for

myself, whoever did it has a chance to tell me. I strongly advise him to." I saw the flicker of Hicksey's eyes shot guardedly in my direction, but no one moved and no one spoke.

"Very well," Miss Monk said. "I know of two boys who were in the building late yesterday, I wonder if either of them knows anything about it?" She gave me a long steady look and then said suddenly, "Emerson, did you come up here after you left Mr. Apgar's office?"

Hicksey's colour had got a good deal better. He gave a start of surprise and said, "No, Miss Monk."

"You're quite sure about that?"

Hicksey assumed an injured look. "Yes, Miss Monk."

"You and John left the building as soon as Mr. Apgar let you go?"

Hicksey opened his mouth and then closed it. "Sure, I guess so," he stammered.

"Either you did or you didn't," said Miss Monk. "You don't have to guess."

Hicksey remained silent.

"Emerson," said Miss Monk, "you must answer my question."

"Well, all I know is, we came out, and then we had a kind of argument. And then I went home."

"What did you argue about?"

"Oh, nothing. John had something he wanted me to do, and I didn't want to. He hit me and——" Hicksey raised a hand and touched his cheek. There was, sure enough, a slight red mark below the eye.

"What were you arguing about?" Miss Monk repeated.

Hicksey had looked down at his hands, frowning.
“I won’t tell you,” he muttered.

A kind of icy paralysis had come over me. The sense of fury and outrage, swelling in me, made me want to shriek, “You’re a liar!” but I wasn’t able to utter a sound. Hicksey shot me a second side-long glance, and I suppose my imbecile appearance of stupor and guilt more than satisfied him. “I’m not going to tell you,” he said in a low, defiant voice. “You can’t make me.”

“I don’t think it will be necessary,” Miss Monk said. “Let me see your ink bottle, please.”

At the words, I gave myself up for lost. Even I could see that when it came my turn to produce mine, I was simply caught, that Hicksey had me hopelessly entangled. The only thing not clear to me was Miss Monk’s attitude, what she was waiting for, why she didn’t ask everyone to produce his ink bottle then and there. This must have puzzled Hicksey too. His expression never changed, but there was a slight tightening and flaring of his nostrils, as though he scented danger. He waited a moment, no doubt thinking, and then he said sullenly, “Why don’t you ask John for his bottle?”

“I want to see yours.”

Hicksey still hesitated. I have seen that hesitation since. It is the one affected by a professional magician who has allowed his audience to imagine they had seen through his trick—in fact, to be sure that they have caught him, before he dumbfounds them by showing that the hat is perfectly empty. Hicksey raised his desk lid with a reluctant movement. He put his hand in. There was a moment’s delay, and suddenly he raised the desk lid higher, turning over books and papers.

"Haven't you got it, Emerson?" asked Miss Monk calmly.

"Gee, I don't know what happened to it," he began. He gave a wild look around, his composure dissolving. "Somebody took it!" he cried. "Somebody took it to make them think I did it!" He turned his congested face toward me. "And I know who!" he shrilled. He must have been casting about in his mind, frantic, for some clue as to how I had made the change. I suppose he could not find one, since everything had been done at his direction, under his eyes. "John was up here!" he shouted, "Ask him, why don't you? Ask him!"

Miss Monk seemed willing to take his suggestion. She turned a profound appraising glance in my direction. I can imagine what I looked like, for the next thing to a smile went across her face. "John," she said, "did you put Emerson's bottle in this drawer?"

With a great effort I managed to move my tongue. I licked my lips and said, "I was up here. But I never touched his bottle."

"So you were both here," said Miss Monk. "I thought so. . . . Now, Emerson, think carefully. Did—?"

Hicksey had got hold of himself. His voice took on that old, frank, manly ring, and he interrupted quickly, "All right. I admit it too. I tried not to tell you. I didn't want to go telling on anybody. But if he thinks he can take my ink bottle when I'm not looking—?"

"This much is clear," said Miss Monk. "Somebody used somebody's ink bottle. The question is who?"

Hicksey gave an admirable shrug. He scratched his head. "Gee," he said. "Well, would I use my own bottle, if I did it? That's all I can say."

Miss Monk looked toward the door. It proved to be Dennis, carrying a mop and pail. He ambled in, gave a nod to Miss Monk, and looked at the floor. He made a clicking sound with his tongue. "Fine mess!" he said cheerfully.

"Yes," said Miss Monk. She looked at me and then at Hicksey. "But we're going to clear it up." Her messenger had entered behind Dennis, and she waited until he took his seat. "Carl," she said then, "I think Emerson may want to get his school things together after he has seen Mr. Apgar. Have you anything of his?"

I have forgotten Carl's last name, but I can remember his guileless vacant face and short whitish hair perfectly. He blinked in the bewildered way he had. "Why, no, Miss Monk." The words weren't out of his mouth when he blushed, struck his knuckles against his head. "Nobody home!" he said. He reached into his desk, faced about and set an ink bottle in front of Hicksey. "Say thanks," he stuttered. "I borrowed it before you came in. I hope you don't mind."

"Emerson," Miss Monk said, "you may go down to Mr. Apgar's office now."

Hicksey sat motionless. His expression was distraught, and I was not sorry to think how he must be feeling. Still angry, still outraged by his attempt to betray me, I looked at him with scorn and hatred, unable to imagine what I had ever seen in him. A moment passed while he continued to stare at Carl's amiable, somewhat witless face, and then I suppose Hicksey showed me—in fact, he showed us all. He got to his feet. He made a kind of bow to Carl. "Oh," he said with some elegance, "don't mention it. You're quite welcome, I'm sure."

Abdication

BY SIDNEY YOUNG

DARLING, how sweet of you to come and take tea with me. Sit you down. And here is Groves with the tray. Put the cake-stand here, Groves, just beside me. That's right. My dear, what a pretty dress you are wearing. Lord, when I was your age I had an eighteen inch waist. It was devilish uncomfortable, too! You youngsters have more sense than we had, though I must say, Darling, that I do not admire the results of this modern sun bathing business. So many naked legs about. Naturally they become scratched. Most unpleasant. I saw quite a number in the Park yesterday and they were exceedingly trying to the eyes.

Tea? No sugar? Umph! I take four lumps myself! Yes, my dear, you are my only guest. I'm getting too old for birthday parties. Besides, I don't think many people would want to come. It was different when I was on the stage—when I was young and famous. In those days I had great difficulty in keeping them all away.

Try one of these honey sandwiches. They are delicious, but rather sticky. 'And don't you think my cake looks beautiful? I said to my cook: "Let there be no candles." Very wise of me. Seventy would have been rather a lot, eh? I shall have to put on my spectacles before I cut it . . . my eyes are not what they used to be. So stupid. But you know, Darling, I always wear my spectacles for *fish*. Would you believe it—I once found a bone in a piece of filleted plaice! Of course, I telephoned my Fishmonger immediately, and he was most apologetic

—a dear man, he adores me—but I have never been able to trust him since that awful, terrible day. When I think what might have happened . . . !

Another honey sandwich ? No ? Then try a piece of my cake, and tell me all about yourself. What are you doing ? Playing Viola ! Ah, that takes me back again. I played Viola when I was twenty-four years old ; and John was Malvolio. It was our first play together after we were married. I can still see the posters outside the Old Royalty Theatre, the great scarlet letters : “Imogen Fleming And John Forbes In *Twelfth Night*.” Oh, we were very pleased with ourselves. And after that we always played together—he and I—for thirty years. We were never separated in our work. The critics were very sweet to me in those days. They used to call me “the divine Fleming,” bless them ; and people mobbed me at the stage door. They clung to the sides of our brougham. I remember pulling my bouquets to pieces and throwing those lovely flowers, one by one, into the crowd. How they devoured them ! It was like feeding the penguins. And then there was John . . . always there beside me. Ah, my dear, I reaped a proper man. You see, I was never a really great actress. Folks just . . . loved me. But John was great. John was a genius. He used to say : “Every step in the career of a life given to the public may be likened to the Stations of the Cross. We must pause, and give our best to each of them.” And he did, bless him, he did. I expect that was why he relaxed so violently in private life. He was shockingly unfaithful to me. Once I did threaten to leave him, but he looked so helpless, so appealing, and cried : “Dear Heart, you can’t, you can’t. . . .” well, really, Darling, he was quite right. I just couldn’t. After all, he was a man, and men . . . !

Let me give you another cup of tea. That's right.

Later, he settled down, and we were very happy, very happy indeed. He was always so sweet to me, the lamb. I found life a little hard when he died. Even now. . . . after ten years. . . . But I pull myself together and say: "Now, Imogen, don't grumble! He's having a lovely rest, and your turn will come."

Cream?

Is it not sad, Darling, to think that we who have been famous and beloved will so soon be forgotten? That is our tragedy. The artist leaves his painting, the composer—his symphony, the poet—his beautiful verses; but we players . . . we can leave nothing, save a few cherished memories in the minds of those who love us, and even the memories grow dim and dusty—and die. No, don't attempt to deny it, dear child. It is a thing which you, too, will have to face at the end of your career, when you have abdicated in favour of some younger, lovelier woman.

You remember the lines:

The laurel crown
Above my head
Has fallen down,
Its leaves are dead,

And no one ever
Comes this way,
Even to sweep
The leaves away.

Now I've become morbid! Disgraceful—at my age. You ought to have stopped me, Darling. Besides, I still have my triumphs—even at seventy! There's a charming young man—Richard . . . Richard . . . Tut! I can never remember his other name. Anyway, he is a dear,

dear friend. He saw me play Hermione on his tenth birthday. Now he is thirty, and he still loves me. He once said: "Imogen, you will never be old. Your mind is of the Kingdom of Heaven." A lovely thought. It makes me proud . . . very proud. . . .

You wicked girl ! You are not eating anything ! Have another piece of cake ? Then another cup of tea ? What ? You've had enough ? For Heaven's sake, don't tell me that you are slimming. These modern "banting" theories are all tommy-rot! You need a good chest and a good pair of shoulders for Shakespeare. Plenty of voice, Darling, plenty of voice. Remember the pits and the galleries; they are the soul of the theatre. And always take a good lunch before a matinée. Otherwise, you will find yourself in the hospital!

Well, if you must go—you must. Come here. Bend down and I'll give you a kiss. You're pretty . . . very pretty. And some day you will be a famous actress, eh ? That's right. Now I shall take a little rest. My young man—Richard What's-his-name—is coming to dine with me. I shall put on my best bib and tucker ! After dinner he is taking me to a kinema. He says that my Film Education has been sadly neglected—the young devil ! Apparently a new star has risen whose advent I have failed to observe. A curious name, like some patent gravy. Ah, yes . . . Garbo !

No, I won't come to the door. Draughts, you know. Groves will show you out. Yes, he's new. My last Butler had to go. He dropped things down my back, the wretched creature ! What did you say, Darling ? Oh, yes, I shall enjoy my little dinner party. I've ordered a special sweet for Richard. Good-bye . . . good-bye. . . .

"Of the Kingdom of Heaven." Bless him.

Wood-engraving by Beryl Edwards



Peat

BY EDGAR HOWARD

LOOK at a map of Wales and you will notice the Dee like a snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea at Chester and its body at rest, curving slowly through a contour of green valleys.

Where the tail begins to swell and quicken, there is a scoop of soil, which is the village of Merwen. It isn't large: three scattered rows of dwellings, a few shops, two chapels and a school is all you'll see if you pass through in a car.

At least that's what it looks like in the day, but at night it's different. The sun slips down Red Peak like a lantern snuffed in a hurricane. A few stars glitter like glow-worms in a dark wood, and sometimes a great, golden moon goes swinging along like a hoop going over a hill. But usually it's dark, horribly dark, for the sky is like ink and the air is weighty and silent except for the hunger wrath of barn owls.

Andreas, who was queer and expected a visitation of the Lord, wrested a lean living from a scrap of land on the side of Red Peak. The village itself, couched in the river lowlands, had a wheat belt, but wheat would not grow on the harsh heights of the Vaynol. Its soil was fissured and scarred, straggling grotesquely according to the whim of a gigantic muscle of rock which supported the land and its outhouses. This rock might have been alive once, for it had tensed itself, throwing out

huge tendons, and these were the blackberry mounds of the Vaynol. The soil was arid, for the water went down the stone, and the wandering bramble bushes had to scrabble for foot-hold and for life. Andreas, tenant of the Vaynol, used to say bitterly that the children of the village got more out of the land in a week of surreptitious black-berrying than he did in a year of till, sow and reap.

One afternoon in mid-July, when the air was bright with heat, Andreas was manoeuvring a small flock of sheep into a field, near his farm.

From a small, unopened window, one storey above the ground, a dark, elfin boy watched every movement. It was Llew, the younger son, whom Andreas hated.

"Father's come back," he said, crossing over to a cheap, iron bed. Between one blanket and a mattress his brother lay dying. His breath came slow in a final, heavy rhythm and at times a cough phlegm leaped from his throat.

"D'ye feel better, Jack?"

"Yes."

The voice was still clear, but he stared at the window as if he yearned for a breath of the hills.

Llew sat on the edge of the bed and placed one leg over the other. His foot tapped the bare planking of the room.

"Little . . . water . . . Llew. . . ."

"Righto, Jack."

He brought back a hand-painted cup and pressed the broad, cracked rim between his brother's lips. The cold, spring-water fell into his throat like pellets of ice.

The neck was swollen, horribly swollen, until the head and breast looked like the continuation of a limb.

Looking at him, Llew felt a sharp twinge of pain and asked:

"Can I come to bed with you?"

"Yes."

He crept in and snuggled to the contour of his brother's limbs.

"Your hands are hot," he whispered. He could feel the pulse leap with fever. "Your nails are long, too, Jack . . . do they grow quicker when you're asleep?"

Jack turned over. His cheeks were red and dewed like mushrooms unpicked in the morning.

"Water . . . please, Llew."

The boy slipped out, picked up the painted cup, and clattered down the stairs.

He plunged the cup under a flowing rill which brought water from the great peat ground, a plain on the height of Red Peak, a dark, brooding stretch which heaved like the back of a gigantic animal. The first tenant of the Vaynol a very strong, kind old man whose life had set on the plain of Waterloo, used to keep a donkey which he weighted equally with slabs of peat and drove home along the skyline.

"Llew . . . where are you?"

"Here, father," he turned quickly, a shiver creasing his back.

"Havia bin to fetch the peat?"

"No, father . . . oughtn't I to go an' fetch Doctor Edwards for Jackie's throat. . . ."

"No!" The command was like a whip. "Don't you dare go *near* Doctor Edwards." The anger died out of his voice as he ended simply, "What the Lord wills . . . be done."

There was a queer break in his voice. Jackie knew suddenly that he had been crying, and the knowledge made something twist inside him.

There was a call from the bedroom. Llew glanced at the window. A black light swept into his eyes as he ran up the stairs.

"Here 'tis, Jackie," he whispered, holding the cup near his brother's lips and helping him to rise. "'Oo hurry up . . . father's coming."

He came up slowly, without effort. He took the cup from Llew and placed it on a three-legged table, made by gipsies.

"You mustn't drink too much, Jack," Andreas said kindly, placing his hand on the boy's brow. "Do you feel better, son?"

"Yes . . . father."

Something like hope flashed into the old man's eyes. He went slowly on his knees and prayed so softly that Llew could not hear a word he said, but he watched every heaving movement of his huge back.

When Andreas had finished, he rose slowly to his full height. His head almost touched the ceiling. He unbuckled the belt from the top of his trousers and swung it until the metal struck against the ground. He looked at Llew:

"Go," he said, very low, ". . . get that peat."

The boy looked at the bed. For a second their glances met, then the contact was broken. Llew turned and clattered downstairs.

Picking up a clipper and sack, he made his way up a path that ran like a ribbon up the side of Red Peak.

The bowl of the sky was brilliant with heat. The sun, sparkling like a white-hot furnace, spilled its rays in a single, concentrated focus of molten light. The mountains, wave after wave of crag, seemed to recede and dissolve: a clump of mighty oaks looked colourless and insipid.

Only the peat rill was alive, mirroring a strip of space in its swift, happy movement like a reel of unwinding film.

The heat struck Llew like a sword until his shirt was gripped by the movements of his spine. Half way up Red Peak he stopped at a small farm and shouted at a woman, who was carrying a stool and a pail of foaming milk.

"Hello, Llew," she replied, "is your brother better?"

"Yes . . . thank you."

Miss Lamp, who came from gipsy stock, was dressed in a long flow of satin, whose colour shimmered and faded in the bright sunlight. Her eyes looked black and ancient, her hair straying wild on the forehead, was caught in a huge knot which made the back of her head look twice as large as it ought to be. She had a face of wrinkles in which the teeth, glittering like flints, were sheathed by heavy, red lips which broke into a smile, as she said:

"I saw Andreas take the sheep to market this morning and I asked him how Jack was and he said he was better."

"Yes."

"He was up early, wasn't he? I took Meg and Dain to the fields half an hour afterwards and the hoar was just lifting." She moistened a finger in the milk, tasted it and asked: "Did he sell them all?"

"No, Miss Lamp . . . he's just come back."

"*Just come back . . . but it's only three-o'clock?*"

"Yes, I know," Llew replied seriously, "but I s'pose the Holy Ghost told him to bring them back."

"Oh, the fool!" her voice was incredibly bitter, "fool . . . come here, Llew."

She sat on the three-legged stool and took the boy on her knees, one arm around his waist. His boot tapped the side of the pail.

"Does Andreas ever speak of your mother, Llew?"

"Yes, a bit."

"H'm." A queer scorn flitted across her face, "I was her friend, Llew, and we went to school together, and we played together and told our secrets to each other."

The boy stopped tapping the pail. Miss Lamp asked:

"Do you remember her at all?"

"No, only I've seen her picture."

The old woman sighed and watched his eyes, grey-blue like Ellen's. No, he would not remember. The mother-string of the race had been broken too early.

She spoke in whispers and told him many things, things she thought she had forgotten but not once did she mention the name of his father. The sun watched them with an ancient indifferent heat until the flagstones on the yard were hot to bursting point.

Miss Lamp got to her feet and picked up the pail, saying: "You carry the stool, Llew . . . we'll go into the pantry . . . does Jack cough?"

"Not very much now, but he used to a lot."

"Does his throat pain him?"

"Yes, but it's better now."

She watched his dark, elfin face freckled like the egg of a thrush. A queer look came into her eyes and she glanced at the Vaynol with hate.

They entered the cool pantry and sat on a trestle: "Will you have some buttermilk, Llew?"

"Yes, please, Miss Lamp."

She gave him a large cup and he tucked up his shirt sleeve and plunged his arm into the cool milk.

He drank it at one gulp and slowly licked the coating off his arm. Miss Lamp watched him, as she took up the thread of her memory:

"And then she began to sew . . . she was marvellous with her fingers and often made a dress for Mrs. Coulton."

"The Vicarage?"

"Yes . . . and then she married Andreas."

Llew looked up suddenly. There was a new note in her voice. Cold.

"He never came to our school," she went on. "He was born in Lani and went to Mr. Richards' school for they said it was a better school, but it wasn't after all, though Andreas stayed there till he was sixteen, for his father wanted him to be a teacher, but he didn't and so he ran away from school and started to work with Mr. Green, the blacksmith."

"Mr. Green who's there now?"

"No, his father . . . Andreas got friendly with Ellen and began to walk out with her. Ellen told me that she was courting and I could see that she liked him so I wasn't surprised when they got engaged, but he quarrelled with Mr. Green . . ."

"Why?"

"I don't know," replied the old woman, "but he didn't come back for ten years. . . . I was the first to see him, and he asked me where Ellen was, and I said she was Mrs. Coulton's maid and he went straight there and fixed it all up with the parson and they were married three months later. It was on a Wednesday I remember, for it was raining cats and dogs."

"His father gave him some money and he bought the Vaynol. He worked very hard for two years . . . until you were born. Then he stopped. . . ."

"Why, Miss Lamp?"

"Because . . . lift me some buttermilk, Llew." He scooped a cupful. She drank it slowly. "Because Ellen died when you were born. . . ."

Again the boy felt a pain, like a sword turn inside his body.

"Andreas," Miss Lamp continued, looking at the floor, "was never the same afterwards. He began to drink and go to the fairs and then one day he was converted . . . you would be about four at the time."

"You looked after me didn't you, Miss Lamp?"

"Yes . . . I used to carry you to the Vaynol every Sunday morning and stay to have dinner with Andreas, and then bring you back to your little cot . . . until at last you were old enough to go to school."

The boy bent down to tighten his boot-lace. She asked:

"You know the big stone at the top of Red Gully?"

"Yes."

"Your father used to pray and sing and preach from there and the people came from everywhere to hear him."

"I never heard him, did I, Miss Lamp?"

"No."

She stopped suddenly. Through the window she could see the sky. There was a small cloud in it, the size of a hand. She looked at the boy's long, black hair and asked:

"Where's the sixpence I gave you on Laura's birthday?"

"Here, Miss Lamp." He pulled it out of his trouser pocket and grinned at her, "I'm gonna spend it nex' month at Lani . . . and Jackie's gonna spend his, too. . . ."

"All right." There was a queer look in her eyes, "All right, now you'd better run off or you'll be late. I'll send Laura after you."

"Righto, Miss Lamp." He pressed a kiss on her cheek. She held him close for a moment, then watched him pick up the clipper and sack. He ran fitfully, turning at times to wave to her.

"Laura," she called, "Laura!"

A half-grown slip of a girl scampered into the pantry, and scooped up a cup of buttermilk.

"Laura!" said Miss Lamp, reprovingly, "you mustn't do that without asking! And it's too hot for you to drink so quickly."

"I'm sorry, Auntie."

She stood so stiff and penitent that Miss Lamp had to smile.

"Now run away," she ordered, "up to Red Gully, and go to fetch peat with Llew. Have you washed yourself?"

"Yes, Auntie," she replied, as Miss Lamp scanned her critically.

Laura was a waif left in her care by a worthless brother, who had followed his fortune to Canada. She was a bright, merry girl with eyes like mischief. Her hair, which was amazingly thick, was cut around her head like a cup. Miss Lamp always dressed her in a red and white check blouse and a blue skirt, for they were her favourite colours. Her legs were long and sheathed in black stockings which were always coming down.

She smiled at her aunt and half-ran out of the house, pausing a moment to pull up a stray stocking.

She caught up with Llew, when he was starting up the steep path to Red Gully.

"Can I come with you to fetch peat?" she asked.
"Auntie sent me."

"Yes, if you like."

His voice was indifferent. They climbed in silence until the path thinned into a ravine that was notched in the very rock of the mountain. Its sides were banked with hazel trees. Laura helped Llew to climb to the top, where he picked as many nuts as he could lay hands on, while Laura caught and cracked them between two stones.

When he came down they divided the spoils and set off again, eating them lustily with their strong, young teeth.

When she remembered, Laura asked:

"Is Jack better?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad . . . I'm going to have a drink," she shouted suddenly, running to a mountain stream. She cupped her hands and drank avidly.

"This is the water we get to drink," said Laura, shaking the drops from her hands.

"And us too," Llew replied, "we keep it in a tub."

"Oh, we got a well."

"It's cleaner in a tub though, for there are frogs at the bottom of every well, even if you can't see them and if you open your mouth they'll count your teeth an' make them all rot away."

"Don't talk nonsense," Laura laughed. It was a merry, gurgling sound that irritated the boy.

He did not talk again until they reached the height of Red Peak. For a moment his eyes rested on the large stone where his father had prayed and preached. They stood, framed in the clear air, watching the valley below. Then they joined hands and passed down the other side.

They were in the peat area now. The plain ran black and clean for miles. There were donkey marks on the horizon.

"I heard Uncle Andreas pray this morning," began Laura. "I was passing with the eggs for Mrs. Evans and I heard him inside the barn."

She gave a strange, little grimace of fear. Llew looked unnaturally at the heather bells. He was too young to realise that he hated his father like poison.

"Does he pray very often, Llew?"

"I don't know," the boy replied curtly, "I never listen to him."

Laura knew this was a lie, but said nothing. She stopped to tug up the stocking which was peeling down her right knee. The boy watched her and asked:

"Haven't you got anything to hold it up with?"

"No, not now. I used to have a 'lastic, but it's broken."

"Think I've got some string," said Llew, searching his pockets. Ultimately he discovered a length of twine: "You can have that if you like, Laura."

"Ta."

She took and cut it by banging a part between two stones. When this was frayed, she plucked the pieces apart and tied the larger one around her leg.

"That's all right now," she said.

The afternoon began to cool and they tripped along, arm in arm, like children playing a game.

"How old are you, Llew?"

"I'm thirteen now but I'm almost fourteen. My birthday's in September, September the eighth, and Jackie's birthday is in December. He'll be seventeen then."

"Are you going to have a party?"

"Yes, I think so . . . like yours."

A cloudlet hardly larger than a kerchief drifted along the sky. The air was so still and the blue of space so pure that it looked like a faraway sail on a windless sea.

Laura watched it idly and asked:

"Llew . . . d'ye remember playing 'Postman's Knock' on my birthday?"

"Yes," he grinned, "I kissed you thirty-five times."

"And Mona Owen *forty-five*." She pouted slightly, then turned impulsively to him. "You may kiss me again if you like."

The boy looked at her with sudden amusement, darted a kiss on her cheek and felt elated.

"Not there!" whispered Laura. "On my mouth!" She grinned at him and he bent his lips forward. Then suddenly shrank back.

"Your nose is dirty," he said.

The girl promptly blew the phlegm on the ground, cleaned her nostrils with her hands and wiped them on her stockings.

"'S all right now," she whispered, holding her mouth to his.

The boy looked at her with a queer, sudden distaste:

"No it isn't," he said.

"Yes it is," she kept glancing at him, her hands moving at her sides. There was a dull weight inside her. Its shadow crept into her eyes and its frustration into her voice :

"Llew's afraid to kiss me. . . . Llew's afraid to kiss me. . . . Llew's . . ."

He pushed his fist into her back. She turned like a snake and grappled with him. They rolled over and over, fighting wild until their energy was spent. Llew got the better of the struggle and sat on her stomach, one leg

on each side of her body. Laura kicked hard then relaxed, laughing. The boy grinned back, bending to fleck her lips with his.

"C'mon," he whispered, pulling her to her feet, "we gotta hurry or it'll be dark."

They took an ancient trail that led straight as a tow-rope to a mound. Piled high with slabs of peat, it was set in the centre of a gigantic plain and was the warm focus of earth and sky. Its composition changed from week to week but its form was perennial, for it was an unwritten custom that every cutter should slice a fresh piece for every slab he took away. The mound could be dated back a century, but the great, peat plain was far more ancient. Father Andreas believed it was almost as old as Time, as old indeed as the third day of Creation.

"Wha's the time, Laura?"

Laura pulled up a chain from her neck. Attached to it was a small, thin watch, which her mother had left her.

"Almost eight," she said, "five minutes to eight. Miss Lamp says it's made of old gold."

"She knows, doesn't she?"

"Yes."

Before them towered the great peat mound. The children looked at it, so silent and unmoving but suggesting in its very immobility a wild power of heaped strength. A stranger would have stopped to marvel, but there was only a neutral emotion in their tired eyes, the satisfaction of reaching a goal. The same light that had dawned long ago in the eyes of the ancient tenant, when he weighted his donkey of an evening and drove it home along the skyline.

"Cripes!" said Llew, "I'm tired . . . aren't you?"

Laura nodded.

The boy lay on the ground, his limbs splayed in the abandon of weariness, his eyes roving about the sky. His shirt was open at the neck and Laura could see the clean, brown curve of his breast. It was pulsing so rapidly that his chest muscles rippled underneath his skin. The movement made something jump inside her. She knelt by him. He turned over and looked into her face. It was dirty, but her eyes were strong as blue-bells. He passed his bare arm under her neck and tickled her throat. She laughed. They lay, clean and innocent, looking up at the great sky.

And so the raven found them, winging like a shadow. It flew straight above, its beak cruel and its eyes limpid with life. They heard the clear beat of its wings as they struggled to their feet.

They watched it go, a horrible speck, alone in the great sky.

Llew went white as clay.

"He's *dead*," he whispered. "Oh I'm sure he's dead. Oh, Jackie . . . Jackie . . ."

His little fists tensed until the nails bit into the skin.

He looked at the sky. It was empty. The raven had gone.

He stood absolutely still, until the wild fear in his blood swept into his brain. Crouching low, he ran madly, as an animal runs when it despairs of life and shelter.

"Llew, wait for me!" Laura screamed, straining every nerve and muscle until her throat was dry with the pain of effort.

The wind was harsher now. It stung their faces and sent great rocks of cloud along the sky.

For a second the boy glanced at them. They looked like gigantic slabs of peat.

He stopped.

"I've forgotten the sack . . . Oh, I've forgotten the sack . . . why didn't you tell me, Laura ! . . . why didn't you tell me ! . . . I must go back for it or Father Andreas'll kill me. . . but you go and ask Father Andreas if Jackie's dead and come back . . . to tell me. . . ."

"Yes," said the girl. Her face was dirty white with sweat, and her body sick with running.

The boy turned very slowly. His eyes looked at the great waste and were filled with the fear of peat. He heard Laura say:

"I'll run as hard as I can. . . ."

She bent mechanically to tighten her stocking, then continued running in an even rhythm of motion. Her hair rose behind and streamed over her shoulders.

The sun set like a wound behind Red Peak, leaving a great splash of blood on the plain. It ebbed slowly away until the sky was the colour of peat.

A few stars began to glitter like beacons in a waste land, and a slim, harvest moon swung like a scythe through the clouds.

The girl stopped to pick up something white. It was the piece of string she had thrown away when the afternoon was warm.

Suddenly the mouth of Red Gully yawned before her, and she stopped quivering on its edge. For a moment she thought she heard footsteps and shrank back. A large frog flopped across in quick, frightened thuds, and even as she saw it, an old superstition of her aunt's came into her mind. It would rain to-morrow.

The darkness parted and a man stepped on the plain.

“Uncle Andreas.”

His huge back was bent as if he were trying to lift something from the earth.

“Yes, child,” he looked at her, and she felt the power of his grief. Her heart beating violently, she cried out: “Uncle Andreas . . . is Jack dead?”

The old man glanced at the sky and she saw tears on his face.

“Yes, Laura . . . God has taken my . . . son.”

His pain broke inside him. Crying like a child, he fell on his knees on the rock that stands at the mouth of the Gully. The girl looked at him dumbly. Between the clouds the harvest moon watched them with an ageless glitter.

And so a great silence fell about them numb as a dream. The girl even thought she had slept when Uncle Andreas finally rose to his feet.

A cloud stretched across the sky like a pall.

“Where’s Llew?”

The voice was bitter, but the girl answered simply :

“He forgot the peat, Uncle Andreas, and ran back to fetch it . . . an’ told me to come back an’ tell him if . . .”

“No,” his voice was queerly gentle, “stay here, child.”

Father Andreas straightened his huge back, until he towered against the sky. Slowly he loosened his strap and swung it with all his force until the buckle struck and struck against the rock. Then, he stood waiting.

The girl watched him in horror, but did not move. They remained so still and motionless that, after a while, they looked like monoliths staring out at a darkening plain.

Boanerges

BY G. V. GALWEY

IT was the height of summer and the heat was strong. The crocodile walk of the School back from the Church was hot and dusty, so that their boots grew grey with it and their throats dry. Their minds, too, were dried by the sermon so that Sunday letter-writing after lunch was more than usually tedious. A great many parents had to content themselves for news of their young by studying a plan of the field set for somebody's bowling in Saturday's match. (It was compulsory to write two pages, and a well spread out plan could easily dispose of one of them.) After letter-writing, with their small bellies distended more by drink than by food, most of the boys settled down to a bored torpor, a Sabbath tedium.

Devotions, food, synthetic lemonade, and the strain of composing a letter which would pass Mr. Finch's censorship had not, however, completely drugged the sensibilities of Nicky Thwaytes. He sat in the shade of a great elm in the playground, on the edge of the gravel pits which ran two thirds of the way round the School. His grey Viyella shirt irked his shoulders, and his double-seated grey flannel trousers irked his stern, and he swung his heels over the edge of the pit, which like all good things was out of bounds. He knew a hummock where the cool grass grew, with tender sheathed ends, sugar sweet to suck; where wild strawberries of a fine acidity

were plentiful enough to make a mouthful; where the briars and gorse bushes which overgrew the disused part of the pit would screen him from authority.

He went and found his friend David Armstrong, dictated in a whisper the last difficult phrases of the final page of his letter, and, while Mr. Finch scolded those who had not yet finished in his sarcastic drawl, led him away into the pits.

When they had eaten all they could find, and had counted again the eggs in a linnet's nest to make sure nobody else had taken any, they lay sunning themselves. They took their shirts off and rolled and stretched like cats on a window-sill, until the sun made them too hot for more idleness.

A railway siding which served the gravel pit ran close by the hummock where they lay. David turning over on his front saw trucks left standing on the line.

"Those trucks look all blue and green after you've had your face in the sun," he remarked. "They are really grey or brown, aren't they?"

"I don't know," said Nick, luxuriously rolling on to a cool stretch of grass to look at them. "Let's go for a ride."

"You shove and I'll ride," David answered, and began to chase a green beetle along his arm with a well-chewed stem of grass.

"No need for anyone to shove! There's a slope. Haven't you seen them taking the full trucks down to the main line? They just give them a shove off, and then a navvy jumps on to the coupling until he gets near where he wants to stop, and then he jumps off and pulls the brake up and she stops."

Nick sat up and began to pull his shirt on. He leaped

down off the clay island on which he sat, to the uneven bed of the pit. He could hardly wait to tuck his shirt into his trousers, the new idea was so hot in his mind.

"Half a jiff." David scrambled down after him, bundling his shirt into his belt to save time.

The trucks were drawn up at a loading platform, from which boards were laid from each one to make a gangway for barrows. They eased the brake lever down. Then by straining with their backs against it and their feet thrusting against the next truck they moved it. It barely crept forward at first, creaking a little. They strove at shoving it and it gathered speed until they were running to keep up with it. A leap and a struggle with their legs kicking, and they were up on the coupling, holding on to the back board.

The rhythmic tick-ticking of the wheels over joints in the line grew faster and faster, and the steel rails and wheels sang a grinding song. Sleepers, gorse bushes, little heaps of stone, grass tussocks, clay islands crowned with young ash, deep cuttings and low embankments, all went whirling by. They looked at each other and grinned exultingly. Nick raised his voice to sing above the song of the rails:

"Lift up your heads, oh ye gates; and be lift up:
oh ye everlasting doors:

And the King of Glory shall come in:"

He thumped with his feet on the coupling.

"Who is the King of Glory?"

He beamed on David and nodded to him. David took his weight on his hands and kicked resoundingly on the back boards.

"We two even we——" Nick chanted and they thumped in unison, "—we are the Kings of Glory."

"Again, we'll sing that again," David suggested. Their joyous voices mingled with the noise of their going.

"Boanerges, Boanerges!" Nick shouted. "Make way for the Sons of Thunder." And then, forgetting to be Biblical:

"Away, away, with sword and drum,
Here we come, here we come
Looking for someone to kick on the bum
In the armoured cruiser squadron."

They sang together and the sweat on their faces shone and their eyes were brilliant with delight.

"David, thou art translated," quoted Nick.

"I see your knavery. This is to make an ass of me, to fright me if you could——" David took his cue.

Nick interrupted. "But stay. What do I see?"

David followed his glance and his heart froze.

A road high above the general level of the pit, crossed it, bridging the railway. Two figures stood on the bridge side by side. One was the short, hunch-backed figure of Mr. Finch, his hair gleaming like snow in the sunlight and his face a more fiery red than the brick of the bridge. The other was the burly caretaker of the pit, Private Trout; two old allies in the apprehension of breakers of bounds. Nick, however, was not in the mood to be damped by them.

"'Maître Corbeau, sur un arbre perché, tenait dans son bec un Fromage.' Trout—take the part of Maître Corbeau. Finch—I think we will cast you with your round—er—sunny countenance for the part of Fromage. You put me in mind of a round, red, Dutch cheese."

"Keep your head down," David muttered.
"What a hope!" said Nicky, obeying all the same.
"Jump off, when we get under the bridge."
"The truck will run on to the main line."
"No. We'll brake a bit. Then I can run and latch
the lever up."

"We're going a corking speed."

"We must if we're not going to be recognised."

David hung one foot below the buffer and felt for the brake lever with it. He crooked his instep under the lever and pulled it up gently. The wheels squealed and they slackened speed. He eased it down again. He raised his head for an instant to find some landmark, a point at which to jamb the brake on, and chose an ash among the gorse bushes which crowded the slope of the cutting just before the bridge. They waited crouched on the coupling.

"I'm glad you haven't got red hair," said Nick.

David laughed in spite of his anxiety. The tree flickered past them. David heaved the lever upward with his foot. The truck shot into the cool shadow of the bridge and the groan of the brake echoed round them. They jumped and Nick fell sprawling. David managed to run a few yards with the truck and slip the brake lever into the catch which held it on. It croaked to a standstill in the strong sunlight beyond the bridge, and they were left in the shadow with Mr. Finch and Trout on the bridge above.

"Cor!" said Trout. "The nippers!" His voice held a note of admiration, and the arch of the bridge made it vibrate round them.

"They must be under the bridge, Trout." Mr. Finch spoke loudly to make quite sure they would hear him and in the hope of frightening them out.

"Speak up!" Nick whispered. He felt an uncontrollable desire to laugh but David in dour silence began to pull his shirt on.

"Must be!" Trout answered.

"You watch that side; I'll watch this," Mr. Finch commanded loudly.

"Can you hear me at the back of the class?" Nick raised his chin in faithful imitation of Mr. Finch about to cast a pearl. They heard Trout's footsteps going back across the bridge and the sound conjured up a vision, unrealised before, of him and Mr. Finch hurrying across and seeing only an empty truck. Nicky shivered with suppressed laughter at the idea.

"D'you think le pauvre petit Fromage can see over the parapet without Corbeau to tennay him debout?" Nick asked. "He probably has to peep round the edge now."

There was a long pause while nothing happened at all. Then they began to hear the impatient tapping of Mr. Finch's stick. It grew louder and louder, ending with a veritable battery of rat-tats.

"Come out," he barked. "The longer you waste my time the worse for you. I shall wait for you till you do come!"

Trout ponderously shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Who takes care of the caretaker's daughter, when the caretaker's busy taking care?" Nick whispered.

Another long silence followed, and again the stick-tapping began. It stopped abruptly, di appointing Nicky, who was mimicking this mannerism down below.

"Trout!" Mr. Finch ordered. "Go down and fetch them. I shall see them if they run out on this side."

There was a long and rather mutinous pause before they heard Trout's "Very good, Sir," and they could imagine Mr. Finch's imperative blue eye exacting this undignified obedience from the old soldier. Then came the sounds of Trout's slippery scrambling descent. He was swearing to himself, saying often the words "Cor!" and "Rackon."

"Mon pauvre, vieux Corbeau. Quel douleur. C'est penible!" murmured Nicky.

"Oh, shut up!" David stretched out his hand and gripped Nick's arm. Nick felt almost as though he had received an electric shock. He became aware that David was as excited as he for all his quietness, and that the leadership of this escapade, from the moment they had caught sight of Mr. Finch, had passed into David's hands. With a grin he submitted.

"Come along," David snapped, and giving a tug, ran out into the sunlight under Trout's very nose. They ran, bent double to hide their faces, as fast as they could. Trout looked up as startled as if a covey of partridges had exploded into flight under his feet.

"Bloody hell!" he said.

His feet slipped on loose stones and smooth grass. He grabbed at gorse bushes and brambles, but they cut his hands or came out by the roots. He fell heavily and blasphemously, and slid to the bottom of the cutting.

David and Nick plunged into the sheltering gorse bushes. Their hair and clothes grew prickly with loose spines as they tunnelled among the stems. Mr. Finch ran across the bridge but his short stature prevented his seeing over the parapet before they were under cover.

"Little bastards," said Trout intensely, regarding his cut hands, and kicking one of the rails to vent his spite.

"That will do, Trout." Mr. Finch was chagrined and crisp.

"That will do, will it? Rackon it bloody well will do! Cor! Catch the little — yourself! Rackon you can, you pert old beadle."

This last phrase came off his tongue well and restored his self-esteem. That had been one for old Finch. Picking himself up and thrusting his sore hands deep into his pockets, he stumped away up the line, chuckling to himself. Tea awaited him in his shelter.

Nick and David flung themselves down in a clearing round a young chestnut that shot up through the gorse bushes. They lay on their backs and Nick laughed at the gay bush tops, bright with flowers, waving in the breeze. The sound of Mr. Finch's tapping stick died away down the road.

"We've got to get back before him," said David jumping to his feet with the realisation that they must not be caught coming out of the pits.

They forced their way through gorse stems again, and, when they reached more open going, set off at a fast trot for the bottom of the school vegetable garden. It was safer not to come out by the elm.

A hole in the hedge at the top of a clay cliff, and a scramble through briars, brought them out among rows of scarlet runners and peas. Mrs. Finch, in a bright cotton frock that glimpsed among the leaves, was working up and down the rows, picking. Retreat was cut off. Squatting among the brambles they set to work to dust the gorse spines out of their hair and pull them from one another's clothes.

"Now what?" Nick demanded.

David looked at him gravely and saw that hilarity had completely got the better of him. He no longer cared whether they were caught and beaten or not. With difficulty David prevented himself getting hold of Nick by the shoulders and shaking him till he bit his silly tongue.

"I don't want to be found under a gooseberry bush. Not at my time of life," Nick murmured.

"Follow me," David ordered curtly and began to crawl down past the fruit bushes and beans, carefully keeping the rows between themselves and Mrs. Finch. They passed so close that they could almost sense the stress in the whalebone as she bent away from them, searching for the tender pods that hide in the shadowy places.

"You should hear her corsets creaking as I whirl my partner round," Nicky hummed.

At the risk of being heard David kicked him as hard as he could and they crept on. When they rounded the last row of beans they found the garden gate, as they might have known it would be, tight shut.

"That's a worse creeper than Mother Finch," Nick said sadly, shaking his head. They would not stand a chance of getting out without being heard and seen. David bit his thumb in disappointment. It was still moist when he stretched out to Nicky and whispered, "You do the talking! Say we've come to help her as it's so hot."

Nick's nose crinkled with pleasure, his ears seemed to grow gnomish points with delights. He was loving this.

They stood up and pulled the gate open. An anguished groan cut across the peaceful hum of the summer. Mrs.

Finch straightened her back and Nick came forward as ingratiatingly as a puppy that brings its ball to be thrown.

"We thought," Nicky said, "that you might like us to help with the picking, Mrs. Finch. It's rather hot, isn't it?"

"Well now, really——" Mrs. Finch had dealt long enough with boys to be a little bit suspicious. But Nick's smile was so guileless, and she was not unaware of her own motherly charms, and felt a little ungenerous in distrusting their motives. "—Well now, that's very nice of you." Her gentle eyes fixed on David, who was trying to rub the pit dust off one shoe on to the back of the other calf. She succumbed to that wish to protect him and be nice to him which his vague air of defiance sometimes aroused in maternal women. "Don't get baskets for yourselves; just help fill mine."

As a reward for their help she invited them to have tea with her on the lawn in front of the house. They were still sitting there shelling the peas when Mr. Finch came back from conducting an inquisition in the schoolroom. While he drank his tea, they wondered at his satisfied demeanour. He regarded them quite amicably over the rim of his cup; they were not suspects. They felt that the whole business, which all along had held an exalted unreality, was a dream. With downcast faces they concentrated on spouting the peas into the bowl before them. It came almost as a relief when he began to tell Mrs. Finch his version of the tale. He hardly seemed aware of their presence at all.

Mrs. Finch, her head bent over stockings which she darned, made a show of listening. She said, "Yes, dear," at intervals, threaded her needle again, and broke

off a new length of wool and asked intelligently, "What happened then?"

Nick leaned over the bowl and whispered to David, "Then Trout called him a pert old beadle!"

David looked up and Nick's gaiety slipped along his glance, down into David's very soul. A great bubble of laughter began to be blown up inside him. He could not hold the split pod steady over the basin and he shot the peas out of it, all about the lawn. He crawled after them feeling quite weak with the laughter he could not release, and Nick smirked at him, torturing him with it.

"I caught them, my dear. They were coming out of the gravel-pits with their tails between their legs."

Mr. Finch took a triumphant bite of bread and butter. David sat bolt upright suddenly and made a noise like a sneeze. Nick passed him his handkerchief politely under Mrs. Finch's mildly reproving eye. She smiled and the diversion of her attention attracted Mr. Finch's glance. For the first time he really took some notice of them, and was rather surprised at having embarked on the story in front of them.

"Where have you two been all the afternoon?" he demanded.

Nick gave a high pitched snort of laughter. "It was us," he said in a weak voice which then shot up into a shout, "on the truck."

He flung himself face downward on the grass and he and David shook and writhed there in an ecstasy of laughter. They took great handfuls of grass and pulled it out in the effort to stop.

"What is the matter with them?" Mr. Finch demanded.

"I don't know." Mrs. Finch looked up at him with her gentle smile.

"Please God," David prayed inwardly, "I don't want to die of laughing."

God heard his prayer.

Mrs. Finch bent her head over her sewing, turning away from her husband's angry glare. Her shoulders began to shake, too. Mr. Finch seized his stick and as David and Nick rolled on the grass he caught them whack after whack. Their laughter blew away before the sting of the blows.

"Please," said Mrs. Finch with a little cough.

"Go away, you two," Mr. Finch ordered and they struggled to their feet and went. He regarded his wife sternly. She raised her eyes to his and had to put her sewing down lest she should jab herself with the needle.

"Stop it," he commanded.

"I'm trying to," she whispered. "They came and picked peas for me so as not to get caught. They must have come through the hole in the hedge, and I thought they came in at the gate."

He walked away from her and she looked after him, wiping her eyes. He came back and sat down beside her.

"Interesting pair, you know. I'll let Thwaytes play fly half instead of on the wing, and make Armstrong work the scrum next term."

"Yes, darling," said Mrs. Finch.

Nick and David linked arms as they strolled into the bootroom.

"I tell you what," Nick said, "I'm going to write a psalm of David about this. We can sing it at prayers. Nobody'll hear what *our* words are."

Poem

BY A. S. J. TESSIMOND

TO THE WORLD IN THE RARE INTERVALS
BETWEEN THE UNVEILING OF MEMORIALS

Up, world ! Be quick, world ! Crown the head
And flag the sky and raise the cheers,
And say the word that's better said
To open than to earth-stopped ears.
Anticipate your epitaphs
World, before the wise worm laughs.



CAPRICORN: *drawing by John Oldag*

“From Natural Causes”

BY OWEN RUTTER

OH God, please let his heart beat. Don't let him be dead. He can't be dead. He *can't* be. Things like this don't happen. People don't drop down like this without a word. He was talking to me a minute ago. Trying to kiss me. Trying to stop me going. Telling me I'd gone back on my promise. So I had. But he frightened me. I never realized he'd revolt me like that. I almost liked him before, even though he was quite old. I didn't know I'd feel like that when he touched me. He'd never touched me before. I didn't think it would be quite so bad when I said I'd come. I suppose I did know really, and wouldn't let myself. Oh God, you know how much it meant to me to get my caricatures published. It meant everything. It would have given me a start. That was all I thought about, all I cared about. You know that. You must know that. And he wouldn't have taken them if I hadn't promised to come to-night. He was too clever to say so, but he let me see what he meant. I made myself believe I could do it. I ought to have known I couldn't. I ought to have known he would revolt me. You can't study nude for four years without knowing what people look like under their clothes. The only thing you can't guess is whether they're hairy or not. And I didn't expect he'd be in pyjamas when I came. Unbuttoned at the top, so that I could see his chest. It was his chest that made me feel I couldn't. Like a

doormat, though his hands are smooth. That's why I couldn't bear him all close to me. Why I struggled. I never knew he'd got a weak heart, or anything like that. He seemed so strong. But, oh God I'll go through with it if only you'll let his heart beat. I'll keep my promise if I ought to. I didn't ask to be saved from him like this. Oh, dear God, please let him begin to breathe again. Don't let him be dead.

I'm so alone here. It's so terribly still. Even if I call, no one will come. He said so. He said that was why he lived in the Temple. So that he could be quite alone when he wanted to. He said that even the woman who does the chambers won't come till noon to-morrow. The laundress, he called her. He'd told her not to. That was his plan. To have me all alone. All night. Just as he has had other girls here, I suppose. Other poor devils like me, perhaps, who wanted to get on by seeing their work in his paper. Girls he knew he could get his way with because of the chance he could give them.

Perhaps they were all right. Perhaps they didn't mind his chest being like a doormat. Probably they kept their bargains. Not like me. But they didn't have to put their hands on him and feel his heart all still. Or see him staring up at the ceiling as he is now. . . .

Oh God, what ought I to do ? Please let me know what I ought to do. Help me to be brave. I feel trapped, all alone in here, with only the noise of the gas-fire. It's so hard to think clearly. But I must. Please God, help me not to panic. Help me to know what to do. Ought I to go out and get someone ? A policeman, or the porter at the gate ? It's quite close, the one in Tudor Street, where I came in. Or a doctor ? Or shall I wake up the man who has the chambers below ?

But I can't do that. I daren't get anyone. I should have to give myself away. Anyone I called in would know why I'd been here. I mustn't let anyone know I've been here. There'll be an inquest. There's bound to be. Even if there isn't, it'll get into the papers. There'll be headlines and placards. TRAGEDY IN THE TEMPLE. Or SUDDEN DEATH OF LONDON EDITOR. And if they find me here they'll put in all about me. They couldn't keep me out even if they wanted to. And they won't want to keep me out of it. I shall make extra copy for them. They'll put my photograph in. Everyone'll know about me and why I came. They'll ask me all sorts of foul questions. They're sure to. I shall have to own up. It won't be any good telling lies. If I do, they won't believe me. Even if I put his clothes on him they'll know. And I can't do that. I can't touch him as much as that. It'll be no good saying I came to see him on business. They know young women don't go to see men like him late at night. It'll be no good trying to explain. Even if I did, it wouldn't make it any better, I suppose.

But you know why I came, God. You know it was the only way I could get him to take my drawings. You know I only said I'd come because he'd have turned them down if I hadn't. You know it wasn't that I wanted the money. That I minded being poor. You know it's only my work I care about. You know how I've struggled for it. Kept myself from doing second-rate stuff that would pay, because I knew what I wanted to do was right. And it *is* right. It's good. You know it's good. And you know how hard it's been. How I've gone from office to office. How ever the most hard-boiled editors have said they liked my work—but that

they were stocked up, or that they'd got their own people, or something. You've known my grinding disappointment, you know how I've been turned down and down and down, till there wasn't even such a thing as disappointment any more. . . .

And you know how he raised my hopes. When he told me that my caricatures were what he wanted. That he thought he could use them. *Thought* he could use them. All my hopes seemed to be coming true when he said that. You know how pleased I was when he asked me to lunch. And he was kind, even if he was rather repulsive to look at. It didn't matter to me what he looked like. All I wanted was that he should take my work and give me my first real chance. I asked you to let him take them, God. I never thought he'd want to take me as well. He wouldn't have, if I'd been plain or gone about with a shiny nose.

You know I'd never have come to him if there had been any other way. You know I've been good till now. That I've never let anyone do more than kiss me. But it seemed the only way. After he asked me I thought it out and decided it was worth it. I simply had to get on and he was giving me my chance. And I'd come to believe that this idea of chastity for women was rather bogus. I knew that if a girl gives a man all he wants he gets tired of her, just because there's nothing left to hunt. But it didn't matter if *he* got tired of me. Nothing mattered so long as he used my work. I thought it would be a good chance to free myself from all these false values men have foisted off on women. All this cant and sloppiness about virginity. I wanted to have my sex experience how and when I liked. And if my virginity could serve my work it seemed a good thing to

let it. To give it to whom I chose, just as I'd give a dance. It wasn't that I didn't set a high price on myself. I did. That's why I'd never given myself to anyone, not even to Jack, who loved me. But when *he* let me see the terms I felt it was worth it. I felt he was paying the price I wanted, just because my work comes before everything else. I didn't feel it would spoil me. I was going to tell anyone who wanted to marry me. It was to have been a test of a man's understanding. . . .

But it didn't work out like that. That's the worst of one's theories. I thought I could be indifferent and when it came to it I found that I couldn't be. That I couldn't bear him even to touch me. But no one will believe that now. No one will ever see it all as I did, or understand. They'll think I'm bad. Perhaps I am, and that's why you're punishing me like this, God.

Oh, but perhaps he isn't dead after all. Perhaps he's only fainted. I've never seen anyone dead. People don't die like that, all in a minute. Surely they don't. Not without a word. Having their arms round you one moment and the next going all floppy and crumpling up on the floor like this. Oh, he can't be dead. His heart must be beating again. Perhaps it was before and I couldn't feel it. Please let it beat, God, if I try again. Oh, please let it. . . .

No, it's all still. Horribly still. It was the excitement of me. He wanted me so badly. That's what killed him. How funny men are. But I can't stay here with him. I shall go mad if I stay here in this silence. I'd better go and tell someone. I must face it and get it over. Whatever happens I still belong to myself. They can't put me in prison, or anything. It wasn't my fault he died like this. . . .

Need I tell anyone? Oh, God, need I? I can't help him, now. No one can. It won't make any difference to him whether they find him now or to-morrow. And if I don't tell anyone no one will know till the laundress comes. No one will know I've been here, then. I'll be safe. Safe. Nobody saw me come up here. The porter opened the gate for me but he won't have noticed which chambers I came to. He's never seen me before. Hundreds of people come in and out. And I can go out by the other gate. The one in Middle Temple Lane. No one will suspect anything then. No one ever saw us together except that day at lunch. I've never written to him. There's nothing that can make anyone link me up with him.

It will be quite easy to slip away. I can't do him any good. I don't owe him anything. Why should I call anyone? It'll spoil my whole life if I do. No one will understand. They'll think I'm no better than a street woman. . . .

Oh, but I daren't run away. If I do they may find out that I've been here. They'll trace me. He must have hit his head as he fell. Perhaps that's what killed him. They may say it was my fault. That I pushed him. It will look worse if I run away. They may accuse me of murder. No, it's no good. I'll have to stay and explain. I'll be very calm and tell them everything. Perhaps the exchange can put me on to a doctor. A doctor may understand. He may let me go if I tell him just what happened. He'll be able to certify death from natural causes. Then perhaps they won't have an inquest. It won't come out that I've been here. And a doctor may even be able to bring him round. If he's not really dead it'll be all right. Oh God, don't

let him be dead. Do let his heart beat again. Don't punish me so hard. You've sent me punishment enough. I shan't forget it. I've been bad. I was wicked ever to say I'd come, even because of my work. I know that now. I'll do what you make me feel is right. . . .

Only . . . it'll be awful waiting here till a doctor comes. Alone with him. Watching him staring at the ceiling. Staring, with that awful, bitter smile on his face, as if he was jeering at me. I can't wait here. But I'll go for someone. Only it'll be awful to come back again into this room and see him still lying there. And I'll have to come back. They won't let me go. They'll make me come back. . . .

Perhaps I could call out to someone from the window. Only there's no one about in King's Bench Walk now. Only the cats . . . and the policeman on duty. He's there. Standing under the lamp post. If I open the window and shout to him, there'll be no more chance of escape. He'll never let me go. He'll pull out a note book and ask me my name and address. And all the particulars. The particulars—oh God, how frightful that sounds. He'll go on and on and on at me till I tell him everything. I'll have to go with him to the police station. Then there'll be the inquest. And the papers. Oh, I can't. I can't! I must get away. It'll be quite easy. I'll just creep down the stairs, wait till the policeman has moved off, and then slip across King's Bench Walk, through the Cloisters and Pump Court and out by the gate into Fleet Street. I'll be safe there. If I'm careful, no one will ever know.

But I must pull myself together. I must be calm. Calm. Calm. I mustn't let them suspect anyone else has been here. I must just tidy up as though he wasn't

lying on the floor. I mustn't leave those two glasses there. Not both of them, or they'll know someone has been here. That whisky he tried to make me drink is still there. I must pour it away and then wash the glass. I must find out where the glass goes and put it back. It'll be terribly important to find the right place. Otherwise the laundress will notice it and suspect. And I mustn't leave my finger prints on it. I must put my gloves on first. . . .

There, that must be the place. I must be certain not to leave anything behind. A handkerchief or a hairslide. It will make it worse than ever if they suspect anything and track me down. And the worst of it is I shan't know whether they've suspected anything or not. The papers don't always say. For days and days I shan't know whether they're looking for me or not. That'll be almost as bad as having to tell them. Perhaps after all I'd better get someone. . . . No, I can't do that. Besides, it's all done now. I've got everything. Hat, bag, umbrella, gloves. I've left nothing. It's all just as it was when I came. Except for him. I must leave the lights on. And the fire. But it seems queer to go out leaving them on like that. Leaving him in the light. Still staring, with that awful smile. He needs the darkness to cover him. . . .

Oh God, please don't let the door bang too loud. Please don't let me meet anyone on the stairs. Please don't let the porter notice me very much. . . .

Harps upon the Willows

BY JOSEPH VOGEL

I

My father began badly. One day as he tried to lift himself his feet tore through the bottom of his boots. He began as a painter in Poland and all he could look forward to was painter's colic. "I need someone to climb with me," he explained. So he married his niece Zettela and they moved into an attic. They had visions. Six weeks later the police entered my father's name and address into their records, with the colourful observation: "Arrested selling illegal alcohol, three months' imprisonment."

II

They sought opportunity, but all my father could look forward to in Poland was painter's colic. "You are different," said Zettela; "I don't want you to waste your life." In 1904 they kissed the dust of Warsaw and sailed in steerage to New York. When they emerged from Castle Garden my father whispered: "This is a noisy city, so unlike the noise of Warsaw." "It is the noise of opportunity," said Zettela. My father was a realist; he did not believe that the streets of New York were paved with gold. Part of the day he peddled shoelaces and diaper pins, part of the day he pushed a weighing machine. He did not have to talk the new language; the shoelaces and diaper pins spoke for

themselves, and attached to the weighing machine was a sign: "Your Correct Weight—Only one Penny."

III

Until they could shift for themselves a second cousin Franya took them in. "I have no room for you," said Franya; "I have no spare table, not even a chair. But I have a spare mattress and if my boarder doesn't mind I'll let you sleep in his room." So in a tenement overlooking the East River my father and Zettela slept on a spare mattress on the floor, in the same room with a boarder. On this mattress I was born.

IV

My father and Zettela held hands and danced. "The streets are truly paved with gold," sang Zettela. "To-morrow you begin to work, to-morrow we move into our own rooms and I shall have my own stove." We moved into a Third Avenue tenement where I grew up playing with the rattle of the Elevated trains. Every day my father carried milk from door to door. He cried: "I am the milkman, here is fresh milk for your babies, have you money to pay?" And Zettela bought a table and a chair, but most of all she loved to shake the ashes out of her own stove. She loved to look out of the window when my father said gid-yap to the horse, she loved to listen to the tinkling of milk bottles as the wagon jolted over the cobblestones. One day, as my father jumped into the milk wagon, he slipped and the wheel ran over his foot. He lay in bed five weeks, soothed by the moans of Zettela. "Woe is me," cried Zettela, "my life is dark." "Have no fear," said my father, "we are now in America; to-morrow I go back

to work." He went back and found that another man had been hired in his place. That evening a collection agent tapped on the door and cried: "Have you money to pay?" There was no money, so the agent took away Zettela's stove. "Woe is me," cried Zettela, "my life is dark."

V

Memories stand out . . . my father in painter's overalls, the smell of wet paint. There is the wedding of Mrs. Pessel, with a throne and potted ferns, and there is my father clicking his heels hoo-la! hoo-la! on the polished floor. My father caught a stranger blowing itching powder at the bridegroom, and with flying fists threw himself upon him. The picture of the fight is vibrant; there was some misunderstanding. When the fight was over, a dozen men lay stretched out on the polished floor. Memories stand out . . . Zettela and her son walking down the tenement stairs and meeting my father where the banister turns. Zettela clutches her breast. My father shakes his head up and down, and says: "Strike." The word had no meaning for me other than its power to keep Zettela silent for days. One day I heard Zettela speaking to the lady with the curls downstairs. "My husband went back to work for higher wages," she said. Her eyes shone with pride.

VI

A letter from the city of Flatbush. Thadeus writes to my father: "Dear friend, why are you wasting your talents in New York, a city without opportunity? Are you content to slave all your life? Come to Flatbush, here there are many houses and few painters. Here you will be your own boss. Come, friend, you will like this

city. it has many trees and a hill to the north." My father looked at Zettela and suddenly he asked: "Am I content to slave all my life?" "You are different," said Zettela; "I don't want you to waste your life." Then they crated their bed and table and chair and moved to Flatbush, a city of many trees. They moved into a little grey house at the foot of the hill, near the railroad tracks. "Oh, it is different here," cried Zettela, "it is so different! The green hill, it is so green!" My father raised his fist: "That is like Pike's Peak and with me it will be Pike's Peak or bust!" A passing locomotive puffed out black clouds.

VII

Thadeus told many people: "This man from New York is a good painter, he is a craftsman from the old country." My father painted many houses. He believed that honesty is the best policy; he used the best materials. "When I paint a house," said my father, "that house stands like new for many years . . . look, every year the green hill is like new and every year this house, if I paint it, will be like new." My father painted little red roses on kitchen walls, and on the ceiling of a widow's parlour he painted a circle of little fishes. The people of Flatbush appreciated art, business flourished. Zettela found an apartment over a pawnship and bought herself a good fine stove. On the day we moved in the pawnbroker said to my father: "Gild my three balls and let me see what a good job you can do." Business flourished. The Flatbush branch of the Workmen's Circle elected my father treasurer. He sent for his struggling friends in New York and put them to work painting houses—he became a boss. On hot nights

they sat on boxes in front of the pawnshop and sang songs . . . they sang songs.

VIII

"My shoes are too small for me," said my father. Zettela replied: "Buy bigger shoes for yourself." "I don't want to be a painter all my life," said my father. Zettela replied: "I don't want you to waste your life." In 1913 my father took the money he had saved and opened a paint and wall-paper store in the Italian neighbourhood. On the shelves stood beautiful little cans of paint and on the walls hung strips of wall-paper designed with little red roses and long curling ferns and circles of little fishes, and behind the counter stood my father and Zettela waiting for customers. A school teacher came in to buy a ten-cent paint brush, and for an hour my father explained to her how to prevent the hair from falling out of a ten-cent paint brush. A music teacher came in to buy a ten-cent can of blue paint, and he took the occasion to explain to Zettela why she should buy a piano and give me music lessons. Zettela bought a piano on the instalment plan and the music teacher gave me lessons. I learned to play "Hearts of Roses," "The Song of the Ferns," and "The Dance of the Fishes." After practice hour I went out to play with the gang and we stole oranges and plums from the fruit stands. We stole cigarettes from a tobacco shop. We stole chocolate from a candy store. And all day my father and Zettela waited behind the counter for customers.

IX

Zettela finds my father stretched out on the floor. "He is dead," she shrieks, "he is dead!" My father

opens his eyes and says: "A hundred pound can of lead fell on my head." "Woe is me," cries Zettela, "my life is dark." My father lay in bed five weeks. When his hand grew firm he raised his fist and cried: "We are worse off now than when we started; I am going back to honest labour." We moved back to the little grey house at the foot of the green hill, near the railroad tracks. Zettela returned the piano, but she kept her good fine stove, and every day she looked out of the window at the green hill. Every day Mr. Signorelli came to the house and said to my father: "I have a fine dry-goods store and I am so busy I need a partner. Pay two hundred dollars and I will take you in as partner." My father borrowed money and became a partner of a dry-goods store in the Irish neighbourhood. "Well," my father said, "you claimed you are busy, but where is the business?" "The business is here," said Mr. Signorelli," and he disappeared with all the available cash and made my father a present of the business. The creditors took away the present. And Zettela cried because her life was dark.

X

"I was a poor painter in Poland," said my father, "and now I am a poor painter in America. What a world of experience I have gone through! I have been a worker and a businessman, down and up, up and down. Where has my ambition got me? I have flat feet and varicose veins. Why can't I learn what the others learn? They say if you don't succeed the first time try again. Last year a millionaire lost his money, this year he is a millionaire again. What has he got that I haven't got? I walk into the rich neighbourhood and I see houses

painted buff and white and I say to my Zettela: ‘Some day you too will live in a beautiful house, only I will paint the clapboards white and the shutters green.’ And my Zettela says: ‘I don’t want you to waste your life.’ True, why should I waste my life? Now I am a nobody, I can’t even sign my name to a cheque. All right, to-day I make a new beginning. I will go to night-school and learn to sign my name.”

xi

My father learned to sign his name and he looked round for something to sign. He arranged a loan with Hubbel & Bubbel and signed his name to twenty-three papers whereupon the aforementioned father became the owner of a dairy business. He painted the woodwork in white and the walls in cream and over the moulding he painted a row of little red roses. For three years my father and Zettela worked like horses. My father went to bed at midnight and rose at three in the morning to deliver milk. He worked on Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day, Labour Day . . . babies need milk every day. Zettela pressed cheeses and churned butter. I washed bottles and sold butter and cheeses in the store. “Look,” said Zettela, “look how the money is rolling in.” “True,” said my father, “the money is rolling in like nobody knows what.” There was no way of spending it, no time to spend it. In mid-afternoons my father went upstairs to rest. He sat in the rocker to read the newspaper and find out what was going on in the world. Everybody was talking about the World War, make the world safe for . . yes—yes, his shoulders sagged, his head dropped and he slept. His breath wheezed like the wind through an empty house. The veins bulged

from his hands and arms. His feet swelled, he could not put on his shoes at five o'clock. Three years, day and night, the money rolled in, and then Dr. Van Uittenbroek tapped my father's chest and said: "Danger signals!" "What kind of signals are danger signals?" asked my father. The doctor said: "Endocarditis urticaria pemphigus impetigo—see what I mean? Now knock off or take the consequences!"

XII

Oh, there was no downcast heart. My father and Zettela now realized their dreams. They bought a house in the fine neighbourhood and my father painted the clapboards white and the shutters green. They imported furniture with little carved roses from 'way down New York . . . it was a real palace. They held hands and danced and my father sang: "What have they got that I haven't got?" And during the afternoons they promenaded arm in arm along the nice clean side-walks, and Zettela drew in her breath: "Ah, it smells so nice here! Trees, this is a city of trees!" And my father drew in his breath: "Oh, it feels so nice here, I feel like . . . I think I'll find myself a nice easy business with respectable office hours. As they say, money makes money." "And we will send our son to a nice college," said Zettela.

XIII

Something in the wind, a man with a walrus moustache. He interested my father in a knitting mill. When Zettela prayed that my father take caution, he laughed out loud: "Oh, my Zettela, so you think I'm going to waste my life?" So my father became a partner of a knitting mill and he supplied the finances and the man

with the walrus moustache supplied the priceless experience. In an old wooden building they manufactured underwear and shipped their product to South America and Australia, as far as the ends of the earth. "This is a big business," smiled my father, "really, this is a big business." He became an authority on international affairs, and he offered his opinions to the Flatbush *Daily Press* on the proper methods of feeding babies. Whereupon he received many invitations to lecture on the institution of child marriage in India. Soon my father became dissatisfied with the old wooden factory. He borrowed the money and they built a real brick factory and my father painted . . . over every doorway he painted a row of little red roses. "That's pretty," said the partner with the walrus moustache; "I see it come in handy to be a painter." Oh, how my father laughed. "Didn't you know, my good partner, that I am a craftsman from the old country?" "Mm-mm!" said the partner, "what pretty little red roses!"

XIV

Never, nevermore . . . my father's head is grey, and Zettela wears a black shawl. How did it happen? Who can explain what happened? What good is it to explain after it has happened? Here is an earthquake, and here are the ruins of your house. Here is—what is it? and here are the ruins of your factory. Only six months, dear Lord, the bricks are still new . . . still new! and the others come to you and say: "After all you are not so unfortunate, yours was only a small factory; think of the big knitting mills, think of the millions that have gone up in smoke and the thousands of workers thrown

into the streets. After all, you had only a mere forty workers, a mere few thousand dollars, you are not so unfortunate." "Oh-oh!" cries my father, "why do they try to console me?" And he turns to the partner with the walrus moustache: "Tell me, my good partner, what happened? How did it happen?" "Aye-aye!" laments the good partner, "it was overproduction of knitted goods, nothing more, nothing less." And the partners weep on each other's shoulder. And the good partner says to my father: "After all, you are not so unfortunate. You are a worker, you have a trade to go back to. But I am a businessman, what have I to go back to?" "Oh-oh!" cries my father, "why do they try to console me?" And weeping he looks round the factory for the last time, he looks up at his handicraft over the doorways, and raising his fist he cries: "Little red roses . . . never, nevermore!"

XV

"Ah, it is true I am a worker and have a trade to go back to. Would that I had never let myself be deceived. What a wretched life mine has been. With me every joy has been a worry. No, my son, don't you make the mistake your father made. Don't run after visions that are only in your eyes. Would that I could begin over again. I would make of every worry a joy. You know, already I am beginning to feel new pride. To-day, looking for work, I walked into a house I had painted eight years ago. And do you know, the walls were still like new, like new! so bright and fresh I could eat my food from them, and over the mantelpiece was a row of little red roses, so fresh and bright I could kiss them with my lips."

XVI

"My son, you are different," said Zettela; "you have more ambition than the sons of others; I don't want you to waste your life. Buy yourself a new suit. . . ." So in 1926 I bought a new suit and went alone to New York, the city of opportunity. I found work as stock clerk in a stove factory. Every week I sent home five dollars. One day I received a letter from Zettela: "Beloved son, we know the money you send us comes from your heart, but we can now manage without it. Save your money, you will soon want to get married. Beloved son, it fills my heart with joy to tell you that your father has opened a new business. It is called a speak-easy, and upstairs we have a small hotel. I help your father behind the bar. We are beginning to make out well, thank God."

XVII

Another day, another letter. Oh, I close my eyes as mother sings: "Beloved son, it tears out my heart to write this to you. My life is dark. Your father was caught selling whisky, he sat two months in prison. Now he is out and he has gone back to painting, but he is a broken man. The doctor told him he has painter's colic. Beloved son, it tears out my heart to ask you, but please, out of the goodness of your heart, send home a few dollars. Oh, my son, only darkness, our life has been only darkness."

The Cure's Boots

BY GEORGE BELLAIRS

EVERYONE who knew him agreed that Hegisippe Dagnet, curé of Issy-en-Vilaine, was a saint. Even the cantankerous rector of the next parish, embittered by the worries of diabetic diets and ungodly parishioners, declared that his neighbour saw God because he was pure in heart. The curé Dagnet had no money of his own, for he gave all his earnings and grants to the needy or greedy poor of his flock, greatly to the disgust of his housekeeper, Ursule, who, however, being a loyal soul, told only herself that a fool and his money were soon parted, but assured the rest of the world that the curé could do as he liked with his own property. In matters of dress the curé was always neat. Ursule saw to that. Every Friday when he paid her a week's wages, she levied an additional toll of twenty francs and hid it in a place known only to herself. With this fund she renewed her master's cassocks and underclothing, otherwise he would have ministered in rags and tatters. One day the curé appeared among his people in sandals, which caused a lot of gossip but added to his reputation. "He has given away his boots to the needy," surmised a widow who had lived for many years on his charity, and the account of yet another good deed passed into village history. Matters were not quite so straightforward as that, however. The devil tempts simple souls by simple means and with the unwitting help of

Pierre Alzani of Provence, he ambushed and almost destroyed a good man.

It all began at Moncontour. In the ninth century a small portion of the skull of St. Maturin was brought to Brittany and, embedded in a frame of silver, was placed in the church at Moncontour. There it performed a series of miracles on the sick and soon was an object of pilgrimage and reverence from all parts. To this day the *pardon* of St. Maturin at Whitsuntide is the great spiritual and social event of North Brittany. First comes a procession of pilgrims in native costumes. Then there is a paying of respects by kissing or prostrating before the sacred relic. A sermon in Breton is next delivered to a congregation of which only a few can understand a word. Finally a great three days' fair opens, releasing the pent-up emotions of the pilgrims in eating, drinking, music and dancing, love-making and haggling in the booths set around the Place de Ponthièvre. The curé of Issy-en-Vilaine was, in the year of his temptation, honoured by being asked to preach in Breton, the tongue of his fathers. His short vacation was quite an event, for he rarely left his own parish, except when called to give an account of his stewardship before his ecclesiastical superiors at Rennes. He took his nightshirt and razor in a brown-paper parcel under his arm and, with his breviary and notes in his pocket, boarded the 'bus for Lamballe, changed there into a motor-coach running specially for pilgrims and reached Moncontour late in the afternoon. There he was met by his fellow priests and at dusk entered the pulpit to address a huge congregation. He had left his notes on the dressing-table of his bedroom in the local presbytery, so he had to preach extempore. That made no differ-

ence, however, for the crowds assembled were too busy counting their pocket-money and planning their programmes for the fair to worry about eloquence. Then, his task finished, Hegisippe Dagnet retired for the night and slept the sleep of the good, unaffected by the flicker of festive torches and illuminations on his bedroom wall and the blare of brass bands in the square nearby.

The curé had ten francs and a return ticket in his pocket and, although he loved to see happy faces, he found little fun in the noise of the fair, so at ten o'clock the following morning he said farewell to his host and strode beneath the flags and bunting to the main square to catch his 'bus. The diligence was half an hour late. It had served on the Western Front in 1918 and, therefore, behaved with the capriciousness of a celebrity. Until the crowd around the radiator had by their cheering, advice and jeers goaded the driver into a final desperate effort at the starting handle which awakened the sleeping war-hero, Curé Dagnet walked from booth to booth, inspecting articles of clothing, biscuits, bon-bons, coloured drinks and toffee sticks, fairings and "native" products made in Paris and Japan. Finally, he encountered the devil in disguise at the stall of one Alzani, inventor and distributor of "SAAM" (Société Anonyme Alzani-Montdidier), the wonder boot restorer. The polish genius, with one hand in a large and shiny shoe and the other brandishing a duster, spoke fluently of his wares. The curé was hustled to the front line of the good-natured crowd and soon was the object to which the lecture was addressed. "This polish doubles the life of shoes," purred the huckster. "Rubbed well into the uppers it renders them supple, wear-resisting, shining-black and irreproachable. Painted on the soles, it

makes them waterproof, durable and prevents cracking. Attendez !” Plunging his hand beneath the stall he drew forth a dirty shoe and in a short time had transformed it by means of liquid from his bottle and a duster into a shining, lacquered object in which he invited the curé to find his reflection. “Five francs a bottle of six months’ supply,” concluded the bright-eyed Provençal, and the crowd immediately melted away, leaving the curé and the cheap-jack face to face and alone. The heart of the little priest grew sad at the sight of the baffled face and drooping shoulders before him. Hastily he drew out his purse from beneath his cassock and handed five francs to the huckster. A bottle changed hands, just as a great explosion and a shout behind him told the priest that his ‘bus had yielded to treatment. So he dashed for his place and was gone.

Monsieur le Curé had given a full account of his travels to Ursule and enjoyed a supper of raw onions from his garden and cheese and cider from the local farms before his thoughts turned in the direction of his feet. Furtively he raised his cassock and manœuvred them so that the warm rays of the oil lamp fell on his boots. They were solid and serviceable enough for a parish priest and they bore the white film of Breton road-dust. The curé gently and quietly rubbed one of the toe-caps on his black stocking and inspected it again. It was grey and sad-looking from lack of expert attention. Old Ursule as a rule cleaned them last thing at night and in the hurry of dish-washing, laying the table for early breakfast and locking up the house, she spent little time on them, often using the blacklead and boot-polishing brushes indiscriminately. The priest, putting on a bold front, produced his bottle of polish and announced

his intention of cleaning his own shoes. Contrary to his expectations, Ursule showed no signs of rebellion at this encroachment. The master was like a big child and needed humouring, even if she did regularly confess to him a series of most appalling sins. In fact, she brought out rags, brushes and scraping knife and put them on the hearthstone. Then she asked the priest to bless her and bade him good night. The curé took off his boots and replaced them by a pair of sandals which he sometimes used about the house and garden. Then he rolled up the sleeves of his habit, carefully read the directions on the label of the bottle and set about his task. Half an hour later the good man carefully washed the black from his hands and face, read his breviary and said his prayers and quietly crept into bed. The moonlight filtered through the casement of the little house beside the church and picked out in the middle of the hearthrug a pair of large boots, shining like polished jet.

The curé rose at five, for Issy is a large parish calling for a full day of labour. He said his prayers again, thanked God for the beauty of the misty fields in which the labourers were already working, dressed, put on his boots and hastened to the church to perform his early office. As he walked along the well-worn path between the wallflowers his boots shone as they had never shone before, reflecting the bright early sunlight. Instead of preparing his mind for the coming duties, the priest thought of boot-polish and dusters. During the service the reds and yellows of the dresses of saints and soldiers in the church windows flickered around his feet. He found it difficult to concentrate his mind on the task in hand and to prevent his lips from speaking apart from his heart. On the way back to breakfast

bright points of light twinkled round the edges of his skirts as his feet rose and fell.

If ever a man's heart was in his boots, Curé Dagnet's was that bright day in June. After breakfast young Ernest Vitry called to say that his grandmother was dying and was asking for the comfort of the Church. Many of us would have said, "What, again?" out of the hardness of our hearts, for Mère Vitry had been fortified to meet death three times before that year, but had returned from the valley of the shadow again and again like some *prima donna* reluctant to leave the scene of her triumphs. Such thoughts never entered the head of the good father. Taking the Body and Blood of his Lord in his portable vessels, he placed them in his pocket, donned his vestments and followed the lad. Workers, toiling in the fields, knowing his mission halted in their labours. The men bared their heads and the women bowed as the Host passed through the green lanes of Brittany. The priest's boots sparkled amid the lace and black of his attire, making the stuff of his gown look faded green by comparison and filling the mind of the holy man with worldly thoughts. Mother Vitry was out of danger again by the time her confessor arrived and was arguing with the doctor about the wisdom of eating rabbit pie at the age of eighty-seven.

In the afternoon the curé paid his weekly visit to the village school. Seated before a mixed class of children in an atmosphere charged with the odours of kitchen soap, sweat and the stale tobacco from last nights' political meeting, he crossed his legs and, concentrated on the brightest spot in the drab room, his boots. He listened to the teacher hard at work and, at last, only with difficulty tore himself from the state of semi-hypnosis

induced by the points of light before him, and asked questions on scripture, faith and general knowledge.

So the day passed. The villagers who met him remarked on the abstracted air of their priest. To the elders he was not himself; to the youngsters he lacked his customary simplicity and quick sympathy. His mind was elsewhere, but he did not consciously know it. Late in the afternoon he took his walk to the rocky beach, reading his breviary, with his boots flickering around the edges of the pages. Serreau, the fisherman, was taking out his boat to the lobster pots. "Coming, father?" called the man, and the curé hurried to join him. On the way to the pots he could not talk of the state of the sea and the catches, which so endeared him to his fisherfolk. Instead, the light of the sea and sky gathered around his feet and drew his thoughts. Serreau gave him a lobster for his supper and set him ashore as dusk fell. "Something's wrong with the parson," he told his wife as he hung over the boiler in which a score of lobsters were slowly changing from dark, metallic blue to angry red. "Going to preach at the Big Pardon seems to have turned his head. Always he's been the first in and out of the boat, slopping through the water with his boots on and helping me to launch and beach her. To-day he was like a cat in the rain. Picking his way through the puddles like a woman from Paris."

As the priest strode home the darkness fell and the moon rose, bathing the flat fields in a ghostly light and picking out the water ponds in the meadows and setting them aglow amid their reeds and willows. The lobster under his arm began to writhe in an effort to release its string-tied claw and the curé paused to attend to it by Cartier's Pool, where the cattle drink and seek refuge

from gad-flies on hot summer days. As he adjusted the newspaper around his supper, the curé heard voices. It was Feret and Moreau, decent enough fellows by day, but up to no good with their poaching by night. Snatches of talk reached his ears as he stood there. ". . . Must be in trouble of some kind . . . passed me by Cully's farm with his head down and didn't even see me. . . . Youngster says he seemed asleep at school to-day and then woke up and asked them a lot of b——y silly questions. . . . If you ask me the curé's going soft through doing too much running about at everybody's beck and call and getting nothing for it. . . ." The voices died away leaving the little priest wrestling with his lobster and his conscience in the moonlight. The one having been quieted, the good man turned to the other. What had come over him? Why were his people talking of him? He surveyed his work of the past month and found little out of the ordinary in it. Certainly, to-day he had lacked concentration. Yes, and piety, too. He had allowed his thoughts to wander during the most sacred of his tasks. He raised his face to the stars and prayed for guidance and forgiveness. Then he lowered his gaze to the ground and saw his boots. They shone in the moonlight with a silvery glow. The curé's eyes were opened. "You have led me into temptation," he said to his feet, and sitting on the roadside he slowly unlaced his boots and removed them. There he stood with them in his hand and even as he looked at them his heart was filled with pleasure at their bright well-being. He saw himself in a new cassock and elegant silk shovel-hat like the dignitaries wear at Rennes, all to match his bright boots. And he saw himself mincing his way daintily through the wet

grass and muddy lanes of his dear Breton countryside or tripping across wet beaches to the fishing boats like a vixen trying to keep her pads dry. He shuddered and flung his boots far from him. They fell with a plop in Cartier's Pool and the curé walked home in his stockinginged feet.

Of course, Ursule couldn't see his point of view. He was just tired after working hard at the *pardon* and had not been himself that day. He ought to drink some of the Fernet his brother had sent him from Einsedeln and then have a day in bed. Still, that was no excuse for throwing away a good pair of boots. Why hadn't he walked through the mud in them if they distracted him with their shining? "What are you going to do now?" she said, her thrifty soul revolted within her. "You haven't another pair of boots, having spent the money for the extra pair you should have ordered on the Lejeune's seventh baby, which came into the world without a stitch to wear." "I'll wear my sandals until Bourreaux can make me a new pair, well-oiled and without any shine," replied her master. "Sandals! In lanes like ours. You'll have no feet left," gibbered the old woman, making mental calculations concerning her hoard of clothing money well hidden beneath the chancel carpet. "That will be my penance," said the curé. "Meanwhile, I think you might put the lobster out of his misery. There will be enough for two." So the good priest of Issy-en-Vilaine lost his boots and saved his soul.

CONTRIBUTORS

GEORGE BELLAIRS was born near Manchester in 1902 and educated at the local Grammar School. Took his degree at London University by private study and "after graduation", he says, "the late Professor Graham Wallas advised me to start writing if only for the joy of self-expression. I followed his counsel and I have since contributed articles and sketches on a variety of subjects, mainly literary, critical and topographical to newspapers and periodicals, including *The Manchester Guardian*, *Chambers's Journal*, *The Field*, *The Inquirer*." He has also done work for the B.B.C. He was for some years a University Extension Lecturer in Modern European History and has many times visited and written on Nazi Germany. "Brittany", he remarks, "is one of my favourite haunts and there *The Curé's Boots* was hatched."

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET is a well-known American author and a Pulitzer Prize winner. A biographical note appeared in *Penguin Parade I* which contained his story *The Devil and Daniel Webster*.

GUY DENT was born in 1892, and started authorship at the age of eight. Educated at Malvern and Sandhurst, he abandoned the Army for adventure. During three years, with a minimum of money and a maximum of hardship he roamed Africa, Canada and Europe. A pilot during the War, upon its conclusion he returned to literature. During intervals between his various travels he has published over 100 stories here and in the United States. Some years ago he decided against the more popular type of story, and some of his recent work has appeared in the *Criterion* and *Best English Short Stories*. He has also published a novel, *Emperor of the If*.

JAMES GOULD COZZENS is another American writer who contributed to *Penguin Parade I* which included a note dealing with his life and publications.

BERYL EDWARDS was born in 1910 in a London suburb and received early instruction at the local Arts school where, she says, "I was particularly fortunate in being taught by an art teacher with imagination, who used to take some of us during the school holidays to stay on a farm where we spent our time out of doors drawing and painting. I suppose this must have been the beginning of my interest in country subjects" On leaving school Miss Edwards went to Goldsmiths' Art School where she studied for some years, ultimately specialising in wood-engraving. She also went for a short time to the Royal College of Art. She has exhibited examples of her work at the Wood-Engravers' Society, the New English Art Club, the Royal Academy and the exhibition of the Artists' International. Most of her subjects now are found in the country round the Kent and Sussex border where her family has a cottage.

G. V. GALWEY was born in India in 1912 and came home to Dublin in 1916. "But", he says, "Dublin not being a very good place for the family of a British Army Officer, we moved to Southsea till the end of the War. The idea of going into the Navy took shape in my head then, and it stuck although when my father came back safely we moved to London, to Oxford, to Cambridge and finally dumped down on Salisbury Plain, and in the process of moving met all sorts of interesting people from eminent biologists to master poachers.

I went into the Navy in 1926 and after passing out of the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth went to sea in H.M.S. Nelson from September 1929 till May 1931. During that time we visited the Hardanger Fjord, the Channel Islands, Brest, Gibraltar and Malta, Barbados, Dominica, St. Kitts and Jamaica, and went through the Panama Canal and back again to see the American fleet. In May 1931, while on a short air course I got rheumatic fever, and after five months in hospital and nine months sick leave I was invalided out of the Service in July 1932.

We were living in London again then, and as my father had died in March 1932, it was urgent for me to learn a new job quickly. I would have been a dairy farmer if another five months bout of rheumatic fever had not disposed of that notion. So I grabbed the first chance and sold, or rather didn't sell, space on a trade paper on a salary which covered expenses and a commission of 5 per cent which, as I seldom drew it, covered nothing. But in this way I called on and

got to know the firm of advertising agents of which I am now a member.

I am now in a trade where I earn my living chiefly by writing (of a sort) but although I was always interested in writing (my brother founded, and I subsequently edited, a school magazine and some stories were actually printed in the Britannia Magazine) I never thought it could be anything but a source of pocket money and pleasure. I produced quite a lot of written work to let off steam and in the hope of being able to slack a bit at space selling but this story is the only attempt I have ever been paid for."

MRS. R. GIBBONS was born in Beckenham, Kent, in 1897. Her father, an amateur inventor, lost what money he had while she was still an infant and "after that", she writes, "we were always very poor." She became a professional author at an early age, her first story being written on the evening of the day on which, she says, in a sudden flash of revelation, she had learned to read. The story was entitled *The Prins and the Six Tapz*, ended with the sentence "He tund on the tap of gudness; Then he wos happy" and was bought by her schoolmistress for a penny. Later the L.C.C. offered her entry to the Ashburnham Higher Grade School, Chelsea, where she won a literary prize, but the death of her mother necessitated her leaving school at the age of fifteen. After working in various large London stores, embroidery workshops and factories she is now poultry farming.

Of her story, *A Chinese Vase*, she says: "The story was inspired by the expressed hope of an unhappy woman to live again. According to the first rough draft the three girls were, in spirit, one. The maiden in the last fragment recalled to her lover their frustrations in former lives. The method was discarded as too crudely obvious, and in the hope of widening the scope of the story. It was thought, by leaving the three females disintegrated, to envelope the idea of mere personal reincarnation in the larger one of the ever recurring rejuvenation of potent womanhood—despite several sorts of misuse, thus including the lesser in the greater. The larger conception, too, seemed more suited to the personality of the 'noble mandarin'.

It is true that the fragments are no longer united by the personality of the girl; but one idea is common to and contains the last three; which in turn are contained in the first. The Eastern setting of the tale seemed to call for this

enwrapped method, of which a simple concrete example is the Chinese 'nest' of boxes.

Of course the tall graceful vase, dearly bought from the devil, is the symbol of the man's lifelong celibacy; the dissipation of its pearly glaze, into wintry clearness, his disillusionment; and the spring sunshine the final portrayal of the rejuvenation idea which is his reassurance."

GERTRUDE HERMES was born in Kent of Anglo-German parentage. After a year at the Beckenham School of Art and a year in Germany, she joined Leon Underwood's studio and came into contact with the new school of wood-engraving developing under the influence of Robert Gibbings (then running the Golden Cockerel Press) and Marian Mitchell Associated with her were Clare Leighton, Agnes Miller Parker, Blair Hughes-Stanton and others whose work is now well-known. In 1925 a party of them went to Dalmatia to paint but they all caught dysentery and Gertrude Hermes had to spend a month in Italy to recover. The following year she and Hughes-Stanton were married, and at this time their work showed a strong mutual influence. Now, however, Miss Hermes is working out on very definite lines of her own, and a recent article in the *Listener*, commenting on one of her exhibits in the 1938 exhibition of the Society of Wood Engravers (a large circular block of a boy swimming—Miss Hermes, incidentally, has a passion for swimming), classed her as the most interesting and individual of contemporary engravers. "Adam and Eve" was done in 1933, at a time when she suddenly got tired of doing small blocks for book work and went berserk on large cuts; the original of this block is actually 17 inches high. She is now doing more sculpture, in stone and wood, and she designed the large "Britannia" in glass for the British pavilion at the Paris Exhibition. She has just illustrated *The Story of My Heart* for the Penguin Illustrated Classics coming out this May, and is now at work on *The Compleat Angler* for the second batch.

EDGAR HOWARD was born in 1913 and educated by his father in a village school. His first eighteen years were spent in the country, but he did not, he says, realise its power until he came to one of the most depressing towns in Wales—the University Borough of Bangor. "My only dabble into literature", he adds, "came in 1936–37, when I edited the English section of *Omnibus*, the College magazine.

I have published nothing but a few stories in *Omnibus*, which were regarded by most readers as foolish and eccentric."

GWYN JONES was born, of parentage part-English part-Welsh, at Blackwood, Monmouthshire, in 1907. "My parents", he writes, "and this is a common enough occurrence in South Wales, gave me by their own toil a chance to better living than cutting coal, and I was educated with the help of scholarships at the County School, Tredegar, and the University College, Cardiff. For six years I was a school-master in Lancashire, working in my own as well as Education Committee's time, with the conviction, logical not superstitious, that if I had not accomplished something by the time I was twenty-eight years old, I could hang up my hat. I celebrated that critical year by the publication here and in America, of a volume of translations, *Four Icelandic Sagas*, and a historical novel, *Richard Savage*, by writing *Times Like These*, and by becoming lecturer in English Language and Literature at my old College in Cardiff. Before that I had published articles in the learned journals but no original work. *Times Like These*, a novel about the South Wales Coalfield (my father and most of my relations are or were miners), was published in 1936, and *The Nine Days' Wonder*, a Manchester melodrama, in 1937. Add, this last year, a couple of short stories, a radio play, and some broadcasting, and my tale is up to date."

JOHN OLDAK was born in England in 1905. His father was English, his mother German. Soon after he was born his mother left England, travelled with him for some time up and down the world, and finally settled in New York.

Just before the outbreak of war she took him to Germany, where he lived with relations, in order to have a couple of years' German schooling.

Then came the war, and everything was changed. "I had", he says, "to remain in Germany, could get neither money nor news from America, and, being English by birth, was not allowed to stay on at the "Gymnasium" (High School). I went to a national school and became a "war-child" like so many others, and was made to work hard after school hours. I knew what it meant to be faint for lack of food, like other children whose parents were poor.

My lot was exactly the same as theirs, but nevertheless I was looked upon as a foreigner and an enemy.

My experiences of Germany in war-time were those of the children of the labouring and artisan class—the children of the very poor, and they brought me into close contact with working-class people, so that I became more and more separated from my own world—the world to which I originally belonged.

When the end of the war came I decided to go on living in Germany. Then followed the miseries of the post-war period. I studied and worked, and lived as thousands of other artists and students had to live; for weeks on end on nothing but bread, margarine and tea. Even fried potatoes were a luxury.

Apart from my work as an artist I have had various secondary occupations; I have been a shoeblack, a waiter, a newsboy, a dock-labourer, a tramp, an editor and a variety artist!

I held the first exhibition of my work in Hamburg, where nobody came to see it. In Hamburg too, I walked from door to door for months, selling my drawings at twopence a piece, and it was the Hamburg papers that first accepted my work. For seven years I was employed on the regular staff of its leading daily paper, and a number of other papers began to accept my work.

But in the Germany of to-day there is no room for those who hate war and love liberty. And just as they pushed me, years ago, out of the High School, they have now pushed me gently, but quite irrevocably, out of my sphere of employment over there.

And so I have come back, after over thirty years, as a stranger, to London—to the town which is to me excitingly new and yet oddly congenial.

OWEN RUTTER was born in 1889 and was educated at St. Paul's School (Junior and Senior Scholarships). He was for five years District Magistrate in British North Borneo and in the European War served with the Wiltshire Regiment in France and Macedonia. Since the War he has travelled extensively in Europe, America and the Far East, is the author of a number of successful novels and biographies, and a contributor to numerous literary papers.

A. S. J. TESSIMOND was born in Birkenhead, Cheshire, in 1902. After he left Liverpool University he tried school-

mastering for a few months, then gave it up and worked in London bookshops for about two years. For the last eight years or so he has been a copywriter in two successive London advertising agencies. He has published one book of verse, *The Walls of Glass*.

FRED URQUHART was born in Edinburgh in 1912, the eldest of three brothers. When young lived mostly in the country on different estates in Fifeshire, Perthshire and Wigtownshire, where his father was a chauffeur. As a child was delicate and was as often at home as at the various village schools he was supposed to attend. At one time didn't attend school for a year owing to condition of heart.

His earliest ambition was to be an artist, but this was out of the question owing to the state of the family finances. When he was thirteen years of age, the family settled in Edinburgh. At fifteen he went to work in a book shop. He was there for seven and a half years, and hated every minute of it. Trying to get away from it he attended evening classes and sat for the Civil Service Executive Class Examination, but failed. Had already scribbled a little in addition to drawing, first story being printed in the Children's Corner of the *Weekly Scotsman*. But it was only when seventeen or eighteen that he began to write in earnest. While in the bookshop and since then when unemployed has turned out a mass of stuff, most of which he says "will be published only over my dead body". Apart from having one or two book-reviews printed had no success until *The Adelphi* published one of his short stories in September 1936. Since then has published stories in *Fact*, *The Fortnightly*, *The Left Review*, *The London Mercury* and *New Writing*. Has just finished writing a novel *Time Will Knit* that he hopes to publish shortly.

Since leaving the bookshop in 1935 has worked in two other bookshops and as a temporary parcel-porter in the G.P.O.

JOSEPH VOGEL was born in New York in 1904. He was educated at Hamilton College and afterwards worked as a labourer. He has contributed to several American periodicals and a novel of his entitled *At Madame Bonnard's* was published in America in 1935. Another novel *Man's Courage* is due for publication in the Spring of 1938.

I. A. R. WYLIE is as well-known in America as in England. A note dealing briefly with her literary activities appeared in *Penguin Parade I* which introduced her striking story *Witches' Sabbath* to English readers.

ANDREW YOUNG is the fourth of the contributors to the present volume to have been represented also in *Penguin Parade I*.

SIDNEY YOUNG was born in York in 1904. His education was extremely intermittent, owing to ill health. At a very early age he began to study music, and when he was seventeen years old obtained a post as accompanist to a teacher of singing. In 1927 he joined the Arts League of Service Travelling Theatre as official accompanist and remained with them for almost ten years, touring England, Scotland and Wales.

During that time he began to write and many of his literary and musical compositions were brought to light and performed by the Arts League Travelling Theatre. With this Company, too, he received his training in acting, and, since leaving them, he has done stage and film work.

His chief ambition, however, is to succeed as a writer.

PENGUIN BOOKS

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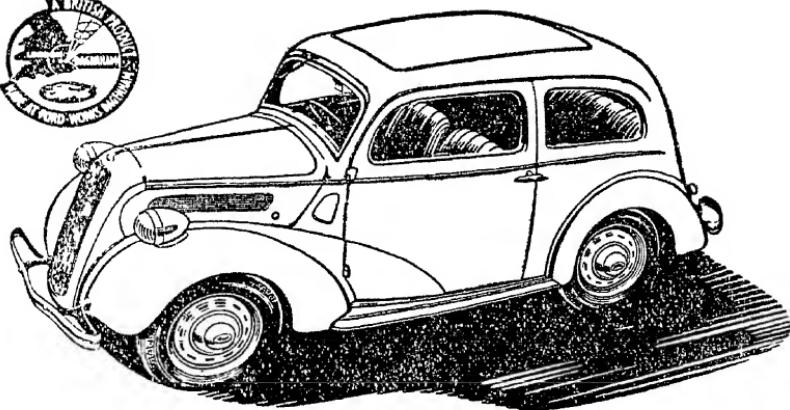
FICTION orange covers

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